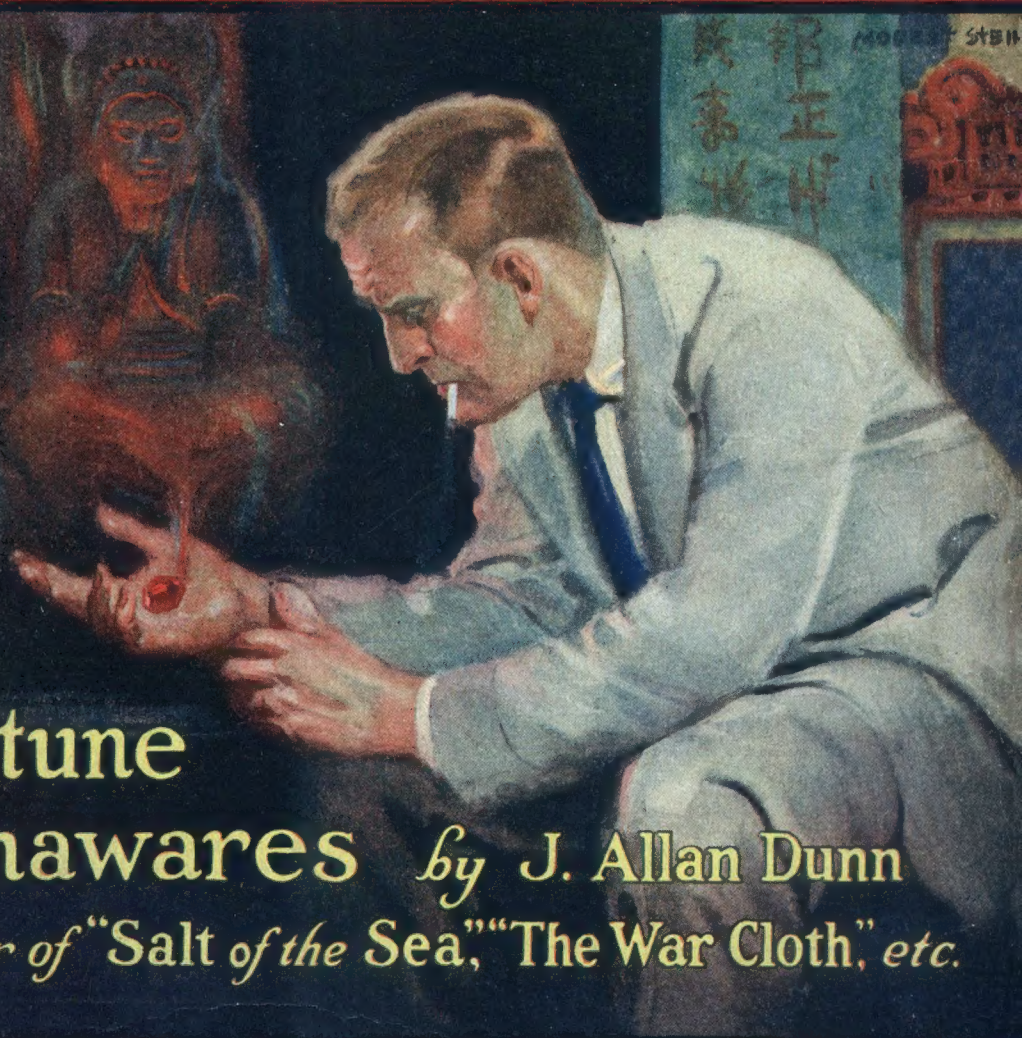


ARGOSY ALL-STORY WEEKLY



Fortune
Unawares by J. Allan Dunn
Author of "Salt of the Sea," "The War Cloth," etc.

10¢ PER
COPY

JANUARY 21

BY THE
YEAR \$4⁰⁰



\$1.00
Down

30 Days Trial—Easy Payments

Only \$1.00 down brings the set to your home for thirty days' trial. If not perfectly satisfied, return the set at our expense within 30 days and we will refund you \$1.00 plus any express charges you pay. If satisfied, start making small payments of \$1.50 a month until you have paid \$13.90 in all. We trust honest people anywhere in the United States.

Price Slashed to \$13.90
Complete Set "Lifetime Ware" GENUINE

Madam: a complete set of genuine "Lifetime Ware" Aluminum, each utensil stamped with the manufacturer's brand—heavy gauge, extra hard, pressed sheet seamless aluminum—and at a price *less* than is asked by others today for thin, ordinary aluminum ware! It heats quickly, will not crack, chip or peel, polish can't wear off. We, ourselves, had to charge \$23.90 for a set like this only a few months ago; but now on a special factory offer we have **smashed the price to \$13.90** (on easy monthly payments), lower than pre-war prices.

Everything in the Kitchen of Pure Aluminum—28 Pieces

Combination tea kettle and double boiler (3 pieces) 5-quart size, 8 1/4 inch inside, with a double boiler 2-quart capacity; one Colonial design coffee percolator (2 pieces) 8-cup size with welded spout, dome cover, fully polished; one roaster consisting of 9 pieces, measures 10 1/2 inches wide and 6 inches high. These 9 pieces have dozens of different uses, some shown in illustration, including bread or bake pan (7 pint capacity); stew or pudding pan (7 pint capacity); muffin pan or mixing bowl (4 pint capacity); egg poacher (5 eggs at a time); cereal cooker or triple steamer. The outfit also includes 2 bread pans, 1 lip stew pan (1 quart capacity), 1 lip stew pan (1 1/2 quart capacity). Two 9-inch pie plates; two 9 1/2 inch extra deep cake pans; one colander with 9 inch top, 5 1/8 inch bottom and 2 1/4 inch depth (can also be used as a steamer). 5-piece combination set, having 12 different uses as shown in illustration, consists of 5 quart convex kettle with cover, 2 quart cake and pudding pan with cake tube; strainer or colander. Shipping weight about 15 lbs. All pieces (except the pie plates and bread pans) are highly polished, made of genuine pure sheet aluminum, extra hard, absolutely guaranteed the famous "Lifetime Ware."

Send Now

Only \$1.00 with the coupon brings this 28-piece "Lifetime Ware" Aluminum set on 30 days trial. Money refunded if not satisfied. We will also send our big Bargain Catalog free.

Straus & Schram
Dept. 9271
W. 35th St., Chicago

Straus & Schram, Dept. 9271, W. 35th St., Chicago

Enclosed find \$1.00. Ship special advertised 28-Piece Aluminum Kitchen Set. I am to have 30 days' free trial. If I keep the set I will pay you \$1.50 monthly. If not satisfied, I am to return the set within 30 days and you are to refund my money and any freight or express charges I paid.

☐ 28-Piece Aluminum Kitchen Set No. A6729A. \$13.90.

Name

Street, R. F. D.

or Box No.

Shipping Point

Post Office

State

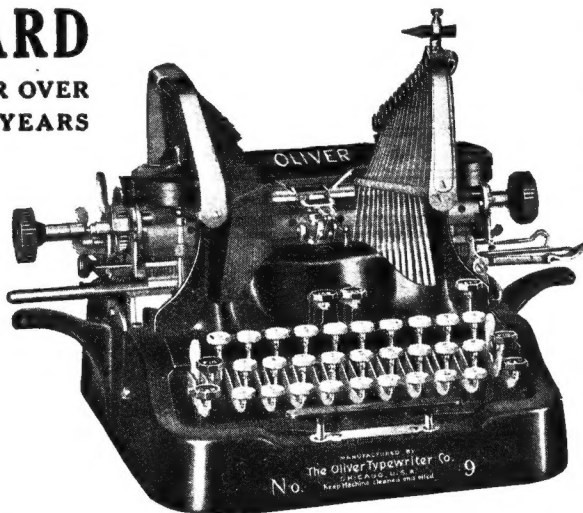
If You Only Want Catalog, Put X in Box Below:

☐ Furniture, Stoves, Jewelry ☐ Men's, Women's, Children's Clothing

Order by No. A6729A. Send \$1.00 with order, \$1.50 monthly: Price, 28 pieces, \$13.90.

**STANDARD
PRICE** FOR OVER
25 YEARS

\$100



NOW
\$49⁵⁰
CASH

or \$55 on Monthly
Installments

Buy Direct From the Factory and Save \$50⁵⁰

This, you will agree, is the most liberal typewriter offer ever made. And it is made by one of the foremost manufacturers.

A standard \$100 typewriter for only \$49.50! That is the amazing price appeal. Direct from the factory to you for free trial—that is the simplified plan of selling.

This is a daring offer. Only the finest typewriter could be sold this way. We let the Oliver sell itself. You are the sole judge. Keep it or return it.

Free Trial

The coupon brings it for free trial. Try it for five days. Compare it. Then, if you agree that it is the finest typewriter, regardless of price, and if you want to buy it, send us \$49.50 cash. If you want to pay on installments, send \$3 after trial, then \$4 per month until \$55 is paid.

If you want to return it, ship it back at our expense. We even refund the outgoing transportation charges, so you do not risk a penny in the test.

You save all the selling cost. That accounts for the half price. You deal direct with the manufacturer.

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Remember, this is the standard Oliver used by some of the foremost businesses in the country, a ma-

chine which for years has been a leader. Over 900,000 have been sold.

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Mail the coupon now, so as to bring the early delivery of your Free Trial Oliver.

Canadian Price, \$79

The OLIVER Typewriter Company

371 Oliver Typewriter Bldg.,
Chicago, Ill.

THE OLIVER TYPEWRITER COMPANY,
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☐ Ship me a new Oliver No. 9 Typewriter for five days' free inspection. If I keep it I will pay \$55 as follows: \$3 at the end of trial period and then at the rate of \$4 per month. The title to remain in you until fully paid for. If I make cash settlement at end of trial period I am to deduct ten per cent and remit to you \$49.50.

☐ If I decide not to keep it, I will ship it back at your expense at the end of five days.

My shipping point is.....
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Name.....

Street Address.....

City..... State.....

Occupation or Business.....

ARGOSY-ALLSTORY W E E K L Y

VOL. CXL

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NUMBER 1

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WHAT theme holds more possibilities of romance and adventure than the lure of gold—not abstract wealth, but the virgin gold that is dug, washed or mined out of the earth? And what setting holds more potential romance, adventure *and* mystery than the heart of Africa—the great Dark Continent with its vast unknown tracks, its incalculable wealth and its undreamed-of secrets. In next week's magazine you will find the beginning of a five-part serial with both this theme and this setting. It is called

THE BANDIT OF BATAKALAND

BY VICTOR ROUSSEAU

Author of "While Dorion Lives," "The Big Muskeg," "Wooden Spoil," etc.

and as older readers know the author is not only a master story-teller, but is also thoroughly at home in both the theme and the setting. Don't miss the first instalment in the January 28 issue.

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Have You Seen

How this test beautifies the teeth?

Millions of people have accepted this offer—have made this ten-day test. They have found a way to whiter, cleaner, safer teeth.

We urge you to do likewise. Watch how your teeth improve. Learn what this new method means to you and yours.

Remove the film

Teeth are tarnished by a film. By that viscous film you feel. It clings to teeth, gets between the teeth and stays.

Old ways of brushing do not end it.

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Film is the basis of tartar. It holds food substance which ferments and forms acid. It holds the acid in contact with the teeth to cause decay.

It forms a breeding place for germs. They, with tartar, are the chief cause of pyorrhea. Very few people who brush

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Dental science, after long research, has found ways to fight that film. Authorities have amply proved those methods. Leading dentists everywhere now advise their daily use.

They are embodied in a dentifrice called Pepsodent. And other most important factors are included with them.

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The test is free

Simply mail the coupon for a 10-Day Tube. Note how clean the teeth feel after using. Mark the absence of the viscous film. See how teeth whiten as the film-coats disappear. Watch the other good effects.

You will realize then that this way means a new era in teeth cleaning. And we think you will adopt it. Send coupon now.

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REG. U.S.

The New-Day Dentifrice

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10-Day Tube Free

649

THE PEPSODENT COMPANY,
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Mail 10-Day Tube of Pepsodent to

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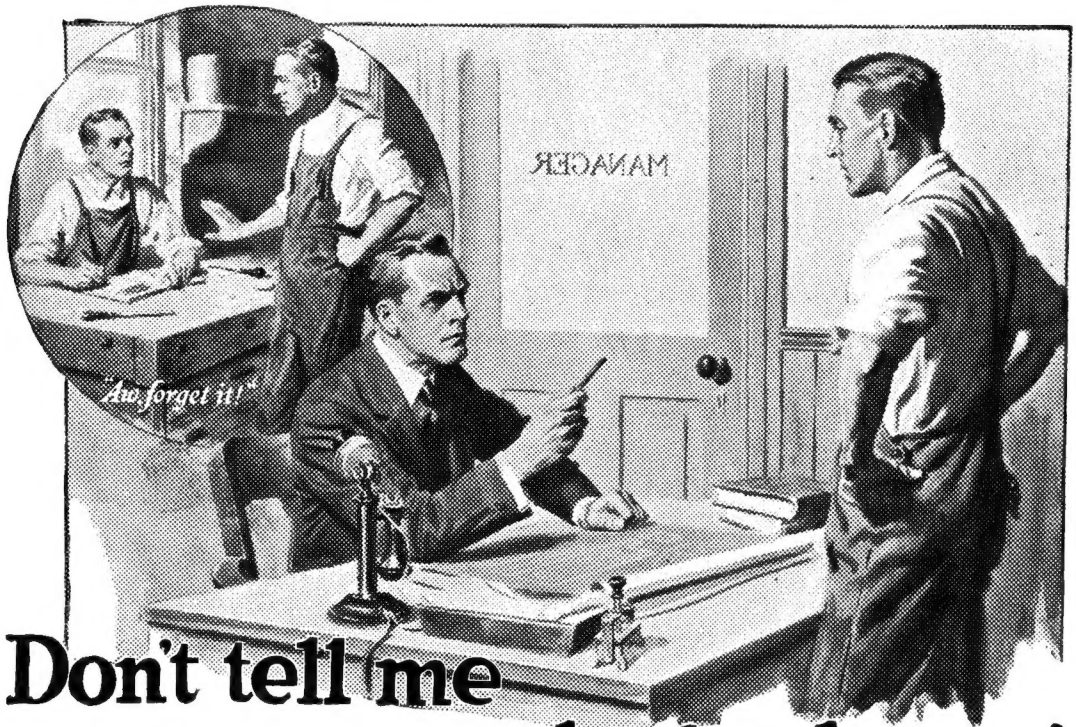
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31 x 4	10.00	16.90	35 x 4 1/2	14.95	24.45
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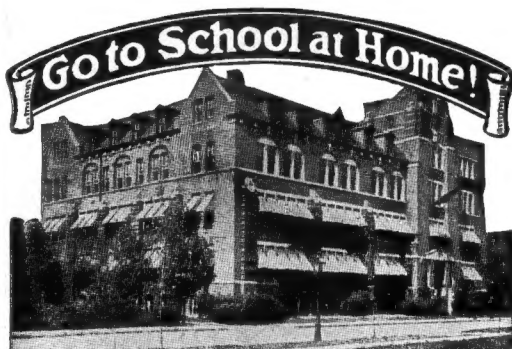
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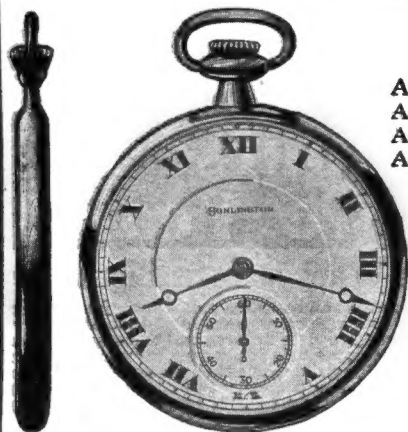
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ARGOSY-ALLSTORY W E E K L Y

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Fortune Unawares

Part I
by J. Allan Dunn

Author of "Salt of the Sea," "The War Cloth," etc.



CHAPTER I.

GAMBLERS' LUCK.

THE story begins properly where it nearly ended—in the back room of the second floor of Pop Crandall's private and protected gambling-house. We had all been celebrating the end of a perfect day by carrying the joy-making well over into the next. Our *alma mater* had managed to carry a hard-fought contest of field events by five points, thanks to En Sue, who had pulled us out of the mud by coming in ten yards ahead in a grueling mile—the record still stands—and that after having beaten their sprinting quarter-miler earlier in the afternoon by half as many inches.

En Sue, slim and tall for a Chinaman, had long established himself in the hearts of the college as an athlete. He ran like a deer and jumped like one. To see him pole-vault was a picture. He was one of

the best short-stops we ever had. Moreover, he was a scholar and a gentleman—plus. His father was some sort of a big contractor in Shanghai, and En Sue's allowance was unlimited. Mine was limited, though I didn't have the sense to see it at that time. He was East and I was West, but there had always been a chummery between us, outside of sports.

I was leaving college when he was a sophomore. We shared one common instinct, or inheritance—gambling—which is many a youngster's way of seeking adventure. But while I played with cards, En Sue knew them. He was the most imperturbable holder of a pair of deuces or four kings that I have ever seen, and he knew the value of every pip in his hand.

That was what brought us—En Sue, Tomlinson, and myself, Kennedy—into Pop Crandall's about one o'clock in the morning. Tomlinson and myself were more or less illuminated, and En Sue less.

We had made the grand rounds, and the new day was very young; also, we had winnings that clamored for action.

Crandall's was in a once fashionable neighborhood, still quiet and, on the brown-stone surface, respectable. It had been a family residence of the close-neighbored type, with all the room to one side of the halls and stairway save for one small ante-chamber in front on each floor.

The basement was still given over to the kitchen and domestic offices whence were served the savory snacks provided free for Pop's clients. The ground floor held in its two big rooms the faro and roulette tables. The second-floor front was dedicated to *vingt-et-un*, or Van John, as we called it. Most of the other chambers on the second and third floor were used for stud and draw-poker.

We found the roulette and faro games surrounded by what Tomlinson called pikers. He demanded what he called "blood for his money," and came within an ace of getting it. While we were standing there Pop himself came up and greeted En Sue with a courtesy that was always a bit too suave. To Tommy and myself he merely nodded. To him we were undoubtedly pikers; En Sue held his respect. I imagine that En Sue played there—oftener and for bigger stakes than I had suspected. I imagine also that he usually won.

Pop had the reputation of running "straight" games, but he was out for the money, and it must have taken most of the percentage to cover the cost of his protection and entertainment. I fancy, from what happened that morning, that he had regarded En Sue as a wealthy "come-on," and, annoyed at his skill and the consequent lack of profit, had determined upon forcing the issue a bit.

He introduced us to a couple of "gentlemen anxious to make up a little game of draw," and the six of us foregathered in the back room on the second floor. Two colored servants brought in an excellent lunch. There was bouillon kept hot over a spirit-lamp, I remember, and lobster salad, a cold game-pie, and an untouched joint with all the accessories; also champagne. One man remained to serve the party.

That was Pop's way, to put you under the obligation of a guest. He gave us a toast to our victory with a special, cleverly done reference to En Sue and a remembrance of my own staggering in second in the hurdles. We took it standing with Pop, in his wonderfully cut dinner clothes, his silver hair, mustache and goatee, looking more like a distinguished general than a profiteer of a bunch of fledgling college kids; for we made up the great majority of the lambs of Pop's fleecy flock.

It's ten years ago now, and I don't remember the names of the two "gentlemen" who played with us. Nor do I want to, but they had none of the earmarks of cappers or steerers or ringers-in—none that my callow experience could determine at that time. They would have passed unnoted in any first-class club. Very likely they did.

Pop honored us by taking a hand. It was straight poker with all the cards in, no "deuces wild," "roodlums," or continuous jack-pots. What Pop called a gentleman's game.

Luck came my way pretty early, with Tomlinson getting his in streaks and En Sue chipping in, drawing cards and laying down his hand with a monotonous regularity. We used to call him the Mongolian Mercury for his speed. With the champagne still dancing in me and investing me with a fictitious idea of my own cleverness, I redubbed him silently the Shanghai Sphinx as I watched his imperturbable face, ivory yellow without suggestion of the blue of shaven beard, his lips a pale coral, and his eyes with their peculiar slightly slanting lids, half closed. They were brown of iris, but they always appeared black, intensely alive, glittering but opaque, looking like polished balls of obsidian.

I was still ahead at three o'clock, but they had nearly drained Tomlinson, and En Sue had bought three stacks. Then he began to win, hand after hand. The two gentlemen had been toddling along, sharing Tomlinson's depletion, and Pop was even till En Sue hit his streak. Pop's eyes were blue, a faded blue with the whites a bit suggestive of the whites of a badly fried egg. He usually managed to inject into them a gleam that passed for friendship.

Now I noticed they were cold, malicious, and the whites congested. Kid that I was, I sensed a certain tension in the game. Pop was out for what Tommy called blood. The two gentlemen showed a certain metamorphosis in the faces—they had become pinched somehow, their nostril-wings seemed flattened, and they were sitting up straight in their chairs with new alertness. Only En Sue was unchanged, fitting fresh cigarets to his long holder of gray jade.

"I'm through," said Tomlinson. "I'm busted."

There hadn't been much conversation at the table. Just the words necessary to the game. As En Sue raked in a disputed pot one of the "gentlemen" showed petulance.

"If this wasn't a piker's game," he said to En Sue, "you'd have won a million with that fool luck of yours."

"Want to raise the limit?" asked En Sue in his perfect English.

My illumination had dimmed to normal with the good supper I had tucked away, and I distinctly saw a swift look pass between Pop and his gentlemen friends. Pop said nothing, but shuffled the cards.

"To what?" challenged the one who had complained.

We were playing with white chips at a quarter, reds at fifty cents, the blues a dollar, yellows five, and browns twenty. A few green markers rated at fifty had been introduced. En Sue swiftly ranged a series of the disks in front of him, and he touched them as he named the new stakes.

"One dollar, two and a half, five, twenty, fifty, and the markers two hundred and fifty," he suggested. "No limit on raising; table stakes allowed a show-down share."

There was another look. Pop wore a stiff-bosomed white shirt with his tuxedo, and I saw it lift over a deep breath.

"That's pretty stiff," he said, "but I like to accommodate my guests. I don't want anybody losing money they haven't got to spare."

En Sue felt in his right-hand hip pocket, then switched to his left. He brought out a case of wonderful shagreen, folding in the middle. From it he took a stack of crisp, new treasury notes.

"I thought there might be a killing to-night," he said pleasantly, and displayed the bills.

Have you ever noticed the eyes of an animal in the dark that suddenly reflect a light, changing to crimson? The eyes of Pop and the "gentlemen" flashed that way as they saw the denominations.

"I am presuming," said En Sue in an even tone that somehow suggested silk, "that the rest of you are equally provided. It is a cash game, of course, unless Mr. Crandall issues guarantees."

For the first time I realized that En Sue recognized the relationship between Pop and the other two.

"Let's cut it out and go home, En Sue," I said. "Tommy's broke, and I couldn't last five minutes at those stakes. It's getting late."

"A gambler's clock has no hands, Ned," he answered. "This is my night, I think. Go along if you're tired, though I should like to have you stay and help press the luck."

He took out from his vest a little grinning joss of reddish stone, and sat the image on the top of a throne of chips. I thought he put some emphasis in his suggestion to me to stay.

"I'll stick," I said. Pop gave me a look that was not friendly. A corner of his mouth lifted so that I caught the gleam of a gold-filled tooth. I wasn't going home after that. But Tommy was palpably all in, aside from his losses.

"I've got a frightful headache," he confessed. "If you chaps don't mind, I'll duck." And he disappeared. I cashed in my hundred or so of winnings and went over to the sideboard. The waiter had been gone some time, after icing fresh champagne that no one had touched. I dished out some lobster salad. In those days I could eat regularly every two hours.

"I will guarantee these gentlemen's accounts," said Pop.

It looked to me as if things were being stacked a bit. There was perhaps four thousand dollars in sight, chips and money paid in. En Sue had returned his bill-fold, but they knew he had all that real money, and they were playing on Pop's say-so.

Pop himself was good, if he would pay, but I remembered the looks between them. I didn't believe they intended to lose; if they did, I doubted their intention to come through.

"Give us a new deck, Ned, will you?" asked En Sue. "You'll find them in the drawer of the buffet, to the right." As I handed them to him he gave me a look. His eyes were like black opals now, suggesting rather than showing hidden fire, the most intensely alive things I have ever seen. The soul of the born gambler was back of them. He stripped the stamp, threw out the joker, and shuffled them, not on the table, but between flying fingers that juggled the cards too swiftly for the eye to follow. He could do anything with those fingers, from the exquisite brushlike strokes with which he wrote Chinese or Greek or Sanscrit, for that matter, to stopping with his ungloved hand a ball walloped hard enough to smash the fence and apparently out of all reach.

The new game started, and I watched from the buffet. En Sue faced Pop, the "gentlemen" flanking him. I kept away from seeing En Sue's hand—that sort of thing isn't good golf, and it isn't good cards, to my mind. He always announced what he held when he didn't toss in, and that was seldom, for the little red joss, or his own skill and judgment, brought an avalanche of chips his way. The "gentlemen" bought fresh stacks, and En Sue collected them. The top of the room was blue with smoke, and En Sue asked me to open the window from the top. This I did, noting a balcony of wrought iron and a glimpse of a dried-up garden in the light I let out between the curtains of heavy crimson brocade.

En Sue's luck became monotonous even to me, and I was watching the vagaries of the drifting eddies of cigar and cigaret smoke, incense above the head of the little red godling. Pop's voice sounded, rasping, all the suavity and gentility out of it:

"What the devil do you mean?"

"I like to play with fifty-two cards, not fifty," answered En Sue, and his tone was that of a twanged steel wire.

From somewhere he had produced an

automatic. I had seen it before. It was of foreign make and mechanism, handled with green jade, carved with dragons. And I had seen En Sue shoot with it, tearing out a two-inch bull's-eye at twenty paces. Now it was leveled at the center stud of Pop's stiff shirt-front.

"Don't touch those cards—any of you," commanded En Sue. "Ned, come here and count them. If I've made a mistake I'll apologize and return my winnings."

I had just started forward when I saw the hand of the player to En Sue's right drop swiftly to his side. They were all playing with their coats off except En Sue, whom temperature never seemed to affect. Pop had been mopping his forehead almost continually for the past half-hour, despite the opened window, and his big silk handkerchief lay in his lap while his hands were outclawed on the table, dragging the baize.

I saw the glint of blue steel following the move of the "gentleman's" hand. The champagne bucket was handy. I stooped and plucked the bottle from the broken ice. The man's hair was brushed back from forehead to the nape of his neck, glossy as a seal, but I marked the protuberance just back of and level with the center of his pointed ear. Using the heavy bottle as a club, I tapped him there. He half-rose and made a head-dive to the floor, apparently attempting to spin on the top of his skull.

The gun fell softly to the thick rug, and I retrieved it just in time to rise and catch "gentleman" No. 2 with a pistol flashing from his waistband, his finger on the trigger, lifting the gun toward En Sue's head.

I fired pointblank across the table, and got him in the right shoulder. The bullet must have smashed a bone, for he dropped his own weapon and his face turned chalky white, the blood starting out on his shirt-sleeve.

It was no time for ethics. The shot might have roused the house. I dragged down the heavy curtains from the pole, gagged him with Pop's handkerchief, strapped his own belt about his arms, used one of the heavy cords that looped up the curtains in the daytime to hobble him and rolled him up in one curtain. The same treatment,

using a napkin for a gag, I applied to the one I had bottled.

Then I opened the door carefully. There was no sound in the house. It was probable the gamblers had gone home. What employees were awake, hearing only one shot, would figure that Pop had the situation in hand and not interfere until they were notified.

Pop, his usually genial face a mask of baffled hatred, still faced En Sue.

"Ned," said En Sue, "I want to make sure of something. I think our venerable friend has been using a hold-out. See what you find under that well-starched shirt-bosom of his."

I reached under Pop's arms and broke away the studs. Attached to the stiff linen was a contrivance of nickel, two sheets of the metal the size and shape of a card, arranged with a clutch that would clamp the card he palmed and applied under cover of his handkerchief and take it between the two covers as he operated a cord that ran down his clothes, and was worked by the opening of his knees. Similarly it could be released.

"See what the cards are, Ned? Both nines, I think. I missed them lately."

The nine of hearts and the nine of spades were tucked away thus snugly, waiting to fill threes or another pair; nines, perhaps, if they came his way.

"If I had you in China, Mr. Crandall," said En Sue, "I could measure out an adequate judgment. As it is—stand up."

Pop did, shaking with rage. He wore no belt, but stout suspenders. I soon had his arms secured with the webbing, which was not elastic, and looked around for something to use on his ankles.

"He has on laced patent leathers, Ned," said En Sue. "See if there are loops at the back. If so, tie his laces together and slip his necktie through the loops."

I wondered at En Sue's perfection of observation as I found it correct and discovered, moreover, that the combination of laces in front and straps behind made a perfect fettering. Another napkin stopped any impulse he might have to yell.

En Sue was gathering up all the cash that was in sight.

"I don't know how long that hold-out was working," he said, "but I'm going to give Tomlinson the benefit of the doubt and pay him back what he lost. If there's anything over we'll hand it to charity."

Pop's face was purpling with temper back of the napkin. En Sue stepped over to the door. I had slipped the pistol into my side pocket, and I looked for and found the one that had so nearly settled En Sue. It was a double-derringer, just the sort of arsenal a crook of this species would slip under his waistband, hidden beneath the flap of his vest. As I lifted it from the floor En Sue whirled.

"Some one coming up the stairs," he whispered. "They've got suspicious. Good thing you opened that window. Come on."

I supposed that he had picked up the red godling with the coin, but as he sprang across the room I saw the tiny joss still squatting on a pile of chips. I stopped and reached for it while En Sue flung up the sash. The door opened swiftly, and I faced two men, one the dealer of the faro bank and the other the man who presided over the roulette wheel. Both were armed. I was directly in line between them and En Sue at the window.

"Duck, Ned, duck!" I heard the latter call.

I had tucked away the joss in my vest, and I grabbed both hands full of the chips and flung them hard in the faces of the pair before I made two sidewise leaps and reached the open window, describing a V. En Sue slammed down the sash as I came under, and then we were over the balcony, down in the dried-up garden. There was a crash of glass above us as we landed, and some fragments came tinkling down. But no one came out on the balcony, nor was the window raised. No more shots were fired. I imagine one of them freed Pop, and he was convinced that discretion was the wisest policy, the way things had broken.

The next instant En Sue, who was the lighter, had mounted my shoulders and was on the wall reaching down his hands to me. I knew his wrists and arms were steel-sinewed, and I hooked on to them, climbing up the interstices of the bricks till I could

grip the top with one hand. We were hatless and coatless, having left them in the down-stairs hall with the doorman.

Four gardens away we burglarized a back entrance into a house that had stood for rent for some time. En Sue had marked it down, with his habit of seeing, and never forgetting anything that came within his vision. His brain was trained until certain parts of it functioned like a hungry sea-anemone, tentacling out for every fragment of knowledge and retaining it until assimilated. We went through the dark basement passage, unbolted and unlocked a door, and, going quietly up the steps to the street level, reconnoitered.

Dawn was just graying the city. The street was absolutely deserted. Patrolmen in that neighborhood were apt to be rewarded for not what they saw, but what they did not see—or hear. A belated taxi came crawling along, with the driver half asleep on the box, and we hailed it. He made no comment. He was used to the vagaries of students, and so we went home—to En Sue's rooms, where, after breakfast, I found he had sent over his man to my diggings for a change of clothes. Later in the day my dinner things arrived, duly valeted, including the coat and hat I had worn at Pop Crandall's. Later still En Sue arrived, and I asked him where he got them.

"I sent over for them with my card," he replied nonchalantly. "Also an inquiry into the state of Pop Crandall's health."

"Any reply to that?"

En Sue never smiled. A flicker sometimes illumined his face with the swift play of summer lightning on the sky.

"No verbal message," he answered. "I imagine he is resting uneasily. I rather fancy I owe my life to you, Ned. I'll not forget it. By the way, have you got both those guns?"

I displayed the souvenirs.

"You might give the derringer to Tomlinson as a memento," he said. "I have given him back what cash he lost. I'd like to trade with you on the other gun."

I gave it to him wonderingly, and he brought out his own pistol with the carved dragons of green jade.

"Let's swap," he said, and insisted on the exchange.

It was four years after I left college before I saw him again. I heard from him once, the next Christmas. I was in Valparaiso. How he had found out my whereabouts I do not know, nor how he had discovered the hotel I was staying at, but on Christmas morning a messenger brought me a little parcel. That was En Sue's way.

In it was a verse in his exquisite writing:

Oh, friend of mine,
The stars perish;
But the soul of man is a thing immortal,
As two fine wines are blended,
Each gaining from the other;
So souls flourish
On the rare essences of friendship.
Each owes to each
Something of virtue.
Between us is a seat
That shall remain unbroken.
For ere that wine, my life,
Was spilled untimely
From its vase, my body,
Thou, as it was ordained,
Didst save it.
May the gods smile on thee!
As for me,
I shall remember.

And there was something else, wrapped in golden tissue—the little red godling.

CHAPTER II.

IN SHANGHAI.

IN the soul of all of us there is a gipsy strain. All men, in their common, early ancestry, were migratory. Later, when I was my own jailer, I thought these matters out, and maybe I shall set them down. But it is so.

Some of us take it out in Fourth of July picnics or going fishing, others go to Coney Island or read adventure stories. It is not because he likes to sweat down by the keel of a steamer, throwing coal or spraying oil into tissue-draining furnaces, that a man becomes a stoker. Adventure calls him. The best seaman, bar none, that I ever knew was born in Dakota, and never saw water deeper than an irrigating ditch till the day when he saw the ocean sparkling beyond the Golden Gate and knew what

sound it was that had crooned him to a motherless sleep back in the prairie hills.

Lord, it was in my blood, and I answered to it! Around the world I trailed, spilling my patrimony and, after that was gone, trailing on, broke, or in some service that had travel as its perquisite. Mine was the love of life, the keen desire to know all phases of it and to share them. I had acquired one philosophy—or, rather, I inherited it, for it was my own father's.

A careless creed—to get all the pleasure out of life without hurting anybody—and, in the main, I think I lived up to it; at least, I tried to. Across the States, the South Seas, New Zealand, Borneo, Burmah, Siam, India, and Ceylon, through the Gulf and the Canal to Cairo, and then to Europe. That was when I quit spending my own money, and began, with a certain knack of making gfriends, to earn enough to keep going. It was South Africa next—the diamond mines and the veldt—then over to Brazil. A little of the Caribbees, a job as freight clerk through the Panama Canal. San Francisco once again, and so to Japan and China.

Never mind the follies, the weaknesses born of casual fellowships. I had my share of those, and have them yet. I was yet to find myself. I was a bachelor seal, roaming, unmindful of the morrow, still sure of a landing more through luck than any special agility, sticking to the seesaw of life for the joy of the ups and downs. Living!

So I came to Shanghai, broke, and in a way discredited. I was too apt to rate my acquaintances for the good I saw in them, for their kindliness toward me and their fellows, rather than their weaknesses. It is not a bad trait, looking back. A man should never go back on a pal, but he should be careful how he picks them. I had fooled my way along, through college and afterward, the tag of the family, with no equipment for any particular profession, and the jobs I landed were not those that I should, with my chances, have qualified for. So it happened that I fell among thieves—they were actually smugglers—and when they got in wrong I, though I was not in the deal, was tar-brushed.

Now, in the outer ports of the world a

man is either successful or he is set down as a present or imminent failure. I had no *entrée* at the clubs. The consul would have classed me as an undesirable, and I was too wary to ask either his opinion or his help. I didn't want to go home. I hadn't tumbled to the fact that I was a loose wire and the East was still calling. So I fell on very evil days and slim pickings.

I was staying merely because the room was vacant, and I didn't show up at the awful *table d'hôte*, at a water-front caravansary kept by a man named Verez. Whether he was Portuguese or Greek or Lascar half-breed, no one knew nor cared. I imagine he must have figured on using me nefariously when I got hungry enough. Gautama knows what smutty schemes he mixed in with. Crimp and fence and procurer he was, and other things. As long as I kept my chin up he left me alone, but he watched me as a spider watches the fly struggle in the web.

I had one lone suit of raveling linen that grew grimmer with the days. If I could have sent it to a Chinaman for laundry and stayed in bed while it was washed I could never have redeemed it. Meantime it grew more limp and baggy and soiled, and my beard sprouted. My shoes were a joke, my hat a mockery. Everything turned down instead of up, and I hung on the fact that I was a white man with every instinct of self-respect and decency, though my cheeks were beginning to get as hollow as my stomach.

Attic geniuses and philosophers notwithstanding, a man's brain grows weak with his body. A good meal stiffens all your fibers. I had lost my front. There were jobs open to act as supercargo for certain nefarious Chinese vessels, but it meant losing caste, not only with my race but with myself. There was one chance I had tumbled to on the Bund—a man wanted to act as store-room clerk and salesman to a schooner trading for *bêche-de-mer*. It was owned by a blackguard named Hawkins, but he was at least white of skin. When I got the tip I was faint of food, and I looked—I'll forget how I looked. I knew that even Hawkins would kick me out for a wastrel. He manned only efficient, and, whatever

my spirit might have wanted to do, I didn't have strength enough to do much more than close my fist. But the job was the only one in sight, and I wanted it.

I had two possessions outside of what I stood in; meaning my rags, a broken comb, and a mangy tooth-brush. These were the red godling and the gun that En Sue had given me. The Oriental joss had not served me well of late. Perhaps he had stayed on the job until he was disgusted with my Occidental instability. I had forgotten the name of En Sue's father. I might have located him, but I didn't feel like begging. I had an idea that En Sue might have written home about me, long since, and I knew the Chinaman's generous ideas of gratitude, but I could not present myself as a suppliant scarecrow.

There had been times when the godling had served me, or so I fancied. As mascot in certain games of cards it had bucked up my nerve—superstition is a funny thing—and got me out of many messes with a turn of the cards. I wanted to hang on to it for friendship's sake. It was still in the little box of lacquer with the verse. How valuable it was as a pledge I could not tell.

When I got back Verez was waiting for me. My room was wanted.

"If you come around to-morrow evening," said the mongrel, "I may have a proposition to make to you."

I knew what he was after as he sized me up. He figured that in twenty-four hours I would be ready for anything, provided there was a meal in sight and a drink thrown in.

I went out with the joss in my trouser's pocket, fingering it, the gun gripped in my other hand, tucked in the side pocket of my coat, and made my way to Lung Hi.

I wouldn't talk with him in the shop of his stinking bazaar. He didn't cater openly to the tourist trade, and his display was a blind. But he was wealthy with what transpired in his back room. Was there a patch of poppies in a hidden valley somewhere, its juice came through to Lung Hi. Did some coolie in the jade or ruby mines get away with loot from Burmah, Lung Hi bought it. Stolen goods are bought the

cheapest, and Lung Hi had any Hebrew fence of lower Manhattan ranked like an amateur.

But my late companions, who had brought me into disrepute, had covered him, and he knew me as of them, if not with them. I believed that he would treat me tolerably well on a loan.

Lung Hi was wrinkled all over his face, save his eyelids. Those well-used curtains to a Chinaman's soul are always unmarked by time—they shut down over the eyes like curved shutters of steel over a display of gems. But when I showed him the gun I saw them quiver. He did not answer any questions—merely broke the gun and spilled the cartridges into his clawlike hand, sweeping them into a drawer.

"You like sell—or you come back, maybe?"

"I'll come back, Lung Hi. That was a gift to me."

"All right. How much you wantee?"

By this time I had some idea of the values of certain things. I knew the handle was real jade and the carvings excellent. The gun itself was worth twenty-five dollars; and that was the amount I asked, imagining he would offer me half. That would go a long way in Shanghai those days. A clean suit of whites, a bed, two meals, a razor, and some blades, and then to see Hawkins. I was not troubling about paying Verez. There had been nights when he had chiseled me out of many a dollar in change and overcharge, before my friends forgot to hand *kumshaw* to a certain disgruntled official.

Lung Hi grunted and waddled over to his safe. When he came back he counted out five Bank of China notes for twenty dollars each—*gold*. I could have sworn I saw a twinkle in his eyes as I sat and looked at them, gaping like a gurnard.

"You pretty nice young fellow, I think," he said. "Only you damn fool. Bimeby, maybe, betteh luck. Mo' sense you get. I keep one year."

Then the beneficent old heathen trotted out some *samshu* and clapped his hands for a boy, who brought from some mysterious kitchen in the rear a bowl of savory chow-yuck and a dish of rice with each grain

white as snow and big as a pea. I tucked the bowls alternately under my lower lip, China-fashion, and shoveled the food into my mouth with chopsticks. Man, it was good! And Lung Hi folded his hands over his paunch and beamed at me.

"Where you stop now?" he asked. "Verez?"

"No more," I said. "To-night I buy some clothes and go along Hotel American. To-morrow I think I can get a job."

He grunted again and patted me on the shoulder as I went out, feeling like a dead jackal turned into a lion.

I got shaved, but I bought the razor afterward. And I got two suits of decent whites ready-made at a Chinese tailor's, with shirts and socks and underwear, handkerchiefs and ties and shoes, all in a leather grip, and had a hot bath at the barber's before I tackled the clerk for a room with a real bed and sheets that were changed daily. I didn't look like a first-saloon tourist, but I passed muster.

"Only two rooms left," he said. "One has no bath, but it is larger."

"*Maskee*," I said, and he gave me the one with the bath.

I had another real meal in the dining-room, and went up to my chamber, with a cheroot in my mouth, sleepy for that bed. I set the red godling up on the bureau and kowtoed to him.

"I do not know your honorable name," I said, "but I take back all I may have thought against you. You are one No. 1 topsiide joss."

There was a perpetual Billiken smile graven on his ruddy features, but it seemed to broaden. I didn't know then what a bully little mascot he was going to turn out.

CHAPTER III.

LI YUEN.

I WAS just finishing an early breakfast the next morning. I had had another hot bath and another quite unnecessary shave, and I felt fit. A boy came into the dining-room, chanting in his Chinese sing-song: "Call fo' Misteh Kennedy! Call fo' Misteh Kennedy!"

I didn't get it at first. Then I nodded to him as he passed my table. The old familiar Americanism of it completely rehabilitated me, though I could not imagine who on earth wanted me. And, on the moment, I decided, with eighty dollars in my pocket, that Hawkins and his job could go hang.

As I went toward the desk the manager himself met me, smiling, tipped off by the clerk. I might have been the local agent of the Standard Oil Company, for his deference, yet I knew they had sized up that light-weighted, fake-leather grip of mine. A tall Chinaman was with him, spectacled, grave, dressed in dark purple silk-brocade, a coral button on his cap. He bowed to me, and I to him, and then he handed me a note. I opened it wonderingly.

The writing was spidery, precise.

The stars perish;
But the soul of man is a thing immortal.
As two fine wines are blended;
Each gaining from the other;
So souls flourish
On the rare essences of friendship.

There the verse stopped, the opening lines, barring the first, of the verse in the lacquered box. And underneath:

Will the friend of my son honor his father
with a visit? At three this afternoon I shall
have the leisure that I trust will serve your
convenience. With your consent my carriage
will call for you half an hour before that time.
May the ties of friendship bind us.

LI YUEN.

The manager purred as I said I would be ready. The messenger left with ceremony, and I departed, almost as bewildered as Aladdin after he had rubbed the lamp. Then I went out to get a few things for a better presentment of myself—not too many—for I had a shrewd idea that Li Yuen, if he knew where to find me, had a true idea of my circumstances. Lung Hi must have recognized the gun and tipped me off.

I made a few inquiries as to Li Yuen. He was top chop, without a doubt, wealthy and respected. It was he, I learned, who, when a certain power had tried for many days in many ways to lift artillery to the

summit of a certain peak, had taken over the contract, and with bamboo poles, with ropes, and tanks filled with water, backed by a consummate mastery of the laws of leverage, had turned the trick, incidentally pocketing many yen. He had been *com-pradore*, contractor, furnisher of labor, go-between for foreigners seeking option and privilege, and he was now retired and surpassing rich with a villa that was in reality a palace.

The carriage turned out to be a motor-car of the latest model and top rank. A Chinese in chauffeur's clothing drove it. Beside him sat my morning's messenger. As we went through the city proper and sped out along the Bubbling Well Road I relished the curious glances sent my way by natives and foreigners alike. It was a far cry, indeed, from Verez's smelly dump to the cushions of this luxurious tonneau! I had brought along the verse and my little godling, now a regular part of my toilet. I swelled up like a poisoned pup during that ride, but I was deflated when I left Li Yuen's late that evening, still in the motor-car, but a wiser, though not a sadder, person.

It is no wonder that Chinamen respect their parents. Li Yuen gave out benevolence and wisdom as an herb yields fragrance. And I know now what I suspected then, that, as we talked, he read my face like an open book, as you or I might read a child's primer in monosyllables, and read it tolerantly.

But first he established my identity, asking me if I knew the rest of the verse he had quoted. I finished the lines, and then laid before him first the original script and then the little red godling. He took up the joss with a quaint smile, and handed it back to me.

"Changwu," he said, "the emblem of good luck—the emblem that suggests to us belief in our ultimate triumph."

He spoke English almost as fluently as his son. When I first went in to him, in his room of carven panels and furniture, with its wall hangings and scroll paintings, he was seated before a table inlaid with yellow marble, where manuscripts of vellum were laid.

"These, my son," he said, "are the four Nikayas of Buddha, the texts that Gotama taught under the great Bo tree. In their sutras and suttantas are the beginning and the end of all wisdom that some day I may know as wisdom if I travel on the Way.

"My boy's debt is to you, and his is the paying, yet I may be suffered to remit a portion of its interest. I could give you advice, but advice unsought is like the knocking upon a bolted door when the master of the house has given orders not to be disturbed. It is like the food in another's bowl when one is full of his own favored pottage.

"I could give you money, but I wish to be your friend. You have not much of that at present. Do not be offended, for these things come to me."

"I am a rolling stone with little moss, sir," I answered, for I was beginning to like Li Yuen, beginning to know the good that was in him. That was no more to be resisted than open water seeking its own level.

"It is not the tree that grows fastest that bears the most plums," he said. "My son will be home in a year from now. He will be eager to see you. I will tell you of what he has been doing, and then, if you will, you shall tell me of yourself."

And later, on the balcony that overlooked a terraced garden with a pool that reflected a crescent moon, with feathery bamboos all about us in great pots of porcelain, big lanterns of oiled silk overhead, and ineffable scents coming up from the dim flowers below, I told him of my idle travels, and, as I unreeled the film, saw myself with new eyes, which I think was what he hoped for.

"And your age?" he asked, after we were silent a while, listening to the mingling chorus of the frogs and crickets.

"Twenty-six."

"A year older than En Sue."

I assented quietly, for the comparison of what En Sue had accomplished and the frittering that I had done was not self-complimentary.

He smoked three of his small bowls of tobacco before he spoke again. Then he stood up, reached into the night, and

plucked a moon-flower, delicately blue, exquisitely perfumed.

"It will not bear fruit until its flowering is ended," he said. "One does not make roof-trees from unseasoned wood." He was apparently talking to himself, but I got the application, and in the spell of my surroundings, and of his presence, I did not resent it. I rather think it was the first time I had felt humble since I last begged my mother's pardon.

"En Sue is different," I ventured.

"From older seed, planted in different soil. And no two things grow alike. You were talking on the Bund about the super-cargo Captain Hawkins needs?"

I nodded. I had ceased to wonder at his knowledge. From many little things I was sure that he or En Sue, or both, had kept closer track of my wanderings than I could have written down offhand.

"If I were to offer you a position, not with much payment, with responsibility, but not needing great toil or knowledge, a place of loneliness, for a year, when En Sue will return and wish to see you, what would you say?"

I hadn't the least idea what he was suggesting to me. I even marveled at my own instant acquiescence when I answered:

"I should think it would be a very fine thing for me."

"So do I," he answered. "And what man can control loneliness? The sky drops fortunes, the sleeper misses them."

Somewhere inside, very softly, music was playing, not the piercing discords and shrieking harmonics that the Occident knows as Chinese music, but minor melodies, born of the rustling of feathery leaves, ripples of elfin tones upon an under-sound that might have been the murmur of the sea. To set down that night, the magic of it and the mystery, would take far too long, is far beyond my power, nor could one not in sympathy with the Orient, the Orient of Cathay, ever understand it.

I, Ned Kennedy, wastrel, had entered some fourth dimension. I was seeped in an atmosphere strange but congenial. I was like a child trying to understand the song of a shell, sure of some message. My body went through its functions—I smoked,

I spoke, and even nibbled at strange candied things, for my dish was empty when I got up to go, but my mind was afloat upon a strange sea of space, looking for some harbor light that I knew would ultimately shine. I think that sea was the ineffable wisdom of Li Yuen, the wisdom of centuries cultivated in congenial soil.

Back at the hotel I set the godling up again and apostrophised him.

"You and I, Changwu, are booked to be the keepers of a lighthouse set upon a lonely reef somewhere between Singapore and Borneo. Our joint stipend is six hundred dollars a year—gold—and found. We stay there alone for a year, you and I, unless the sky drops fortune and we are awake to grab it, or unless the light goes out, when they will send to see what has happened to us. This for a year, Changwu. Until En Sue comes to Shanghai. What do you know about that?"

Changwu didn't appear to know anything about it, but grinned in Billiken fashion, only more wisely. Neither did I know anything about it. But I had accepted it and I still somehow thought it would be a fine thing for me.

CHAPTER IV.

THE LIGHTHOUSE PHILOSOPHER.

MY lighthouse, when I first sighted it from the deck of one of the boats of the Dutch Packet Company, looked like a tomato-can on four sticks. Later it took the semblance of a western water-tank and turned out to be a round-house of wood set up on steel stilts straddling the shoals and reefs of the South China Sea like some weird bug that had been blown to sea and was trying to wade back to land. There was no land to amount to anything save the faint outline of Great Natuna Island. But there was a whole lot of water.

It was entirely too close to the equator to be pleasant and the structure was designed for utility rather than comfort. I used to wish I could treat the Dutchman who designed it to a long vacation in his stuffing-box.

However, there I was and I made up my mind to make the best of it. Changwu was my household god, permanently connected now with Li Yuen's explanation of him as "the emblem of good luck that suggests belief in our ultimate triumph." I fancied that I knew what Li Yuen meant when he said this would be a fine thing for me, a year of loneliness and meditation and instruction.

I had no mind to sit all day like a hermit priest. My duties were light enough, meaning no pun. I had but to keep the lenses clean, trim the wicks, replenish the oil reservoirs and wind up the turning apparatus. Once a month a tub of a packet boat *en route* from Singapore to Pontianak stopped and sent off a boat with oil, water, some supplies and what mail I had. Usually there were newspapers and magazines and books that showed no sign of the sender, but I know they came from Shanghai, and that was sufficient.

To fill in my time I fished. I flew kites, I rowed about in my little tender and went swimming in the one pool where I felt safe from sharks. The waters were alive with those beasts, cruising along the channels or basking on the reefs. Sharks and turtles and giant rays were plentiful, and I got sick of turtle steak and turtle soup in my first month. There were other fishes of gaudy colors and strange shapes, but I was leary of them. Afraid of being poisoned.

My main trouble was the confounded heat. I lost weight every day until I looked ascetic enough, lean and brown as a berry, for I wore little as soon as I had acquired tan enough to discard clothes in safety. Finally I wore only a loin-cloth, save when the packet boat was due. I oiled my body like the natives, and I must have been a weird figure. While I shaved regularly, I let my black hair grow like a Dyak's to protect the back of my neck. I had a rifle along, and I spent a lot of my money in cartridges for that and En Sue's automatic. The purser of the boat handed the pistol to me the first day out from Shanghai to Singapore, a present from Li Yuen. I used to take the empty cans of my grub supply and set them up among

the reefs or start them floating off in the tide rips, and I discovered to my joy that I was a natural shot. Add that to the practise I got and I became a real sharpshooter.

The sea was wonderful, though there were stretches when I was afraid of it. That was before I began to study. The sheer beauty of it was staggering. At times with the reefs and their passages, the shallow pools and deeper holes, it looked for all the world like a great peacock's tail spread out, slightly ruffled by the wind; vivid greens and blues and browns and purples; prismatic, dazzling. Another morning would display irregular breadths and ribbons of satin spread out without a ripple under a sky as hard and blue as turquoise. Or the expanse of it would be turbid yellow, mottled with greasy suds under a sky of brass before the wind came boiling up from nowhere. Then the lighthouse rocked while the steel struts under me twanged with the fury of the squall.

Weird sounds came up from this sea, long, shuddering moans in the night, so that at first I would spring out of my bunk and run out naked to the gallery, convinced I had been hailed. Smells would come from it as if the rotten bottom of the sea had been heaved up to lie in festering slime upon the surface. It came to represent to me a beast, beautiful but relentless, always in wait, snarling, purring, howling, whining, sending out the fetid smell of its carrion-laden breath.

Of course I was liable to go a bit off my head. I saw that and checked it. Here was I who had lived, who loved excitement, the company of my fellows, essentially a gregarious animal; living suddenly the life of a hermit, denied all the things that had pleased me, a fettered wanderer. It was no wonder that I saw visions in the clouds and heard voices from the sea. Nights, the stars often reflected in the calm waters would change to the lights of some big city I had known and loved, the lamps of Regent Street or of Broadway on a wet night, doubled in the rainy asphalt. That, with the phonograph going on some familiar tune! I used to look forward to those delusions and lie awake afterward. It was

the little red godling that brought me to, I think. Anyway, I smashed the phonograph and turned the records into targets and took a brace.

I had already written Li Yuen a halting letter or so, thanking him for the things he had done, and something of my moods must have interlined the writing. The next boat brought me a book on navigation, some charts, a sextant, and chronometers, a nautical almanac and a set of instruments. Also a handbook on the sidereal heavens of the Southern Hemisphere. And, of all things, a book of magic! And I studied.

I bucked away at navigation until I got the theory and swing of it and, after a while found that my noon-reckonings always agreed, which, seeing that the lighthouse was immovable, reassured me. I got to know the constellations by name, and while I was a joke beside En Sue and always would be, I acquired the makings of a parlor conjuror, doing my tricks before a glass.

And I began to keep a diary. There was not much of incident to set down, the arrival of a packet boat or the passing of another, the speck of sail that proclaimed a trepang fisher or, perhaps, some Dyak's piratical *prahu* blown off-land, for Borneo was more than a hundred leagues away. I set down mostly my thoughts and presently, although the habit of thought was not a part of my nature, I began to get a sort of philosophy.

Before that, however, the encyclopedia came. I sucked up the information as a sponge sucks water. I started in with Borneo, to be neighborly; then Malacca, Siam, China, and Japan, and so certain hours of each day on the shady side of the gallery where I had a system of shifting hitches for my hammock. I kept in shape physically. I was a better man for the solitude, and I often thanked Li Yuen. Wise old Li Yuen, who had persuaded and hypnotized me into this because he loved me, for the sake of his son.

In many cuddies, on many decks, on beaches, in the back rooms of island snuggeries I have heard discussed a thousand times the psychology of adventure. The theories agreed in the main, that it—meaning the love of wandering—was handed

down in the blood from bygone generations. That it was often repressed by circumstances, only to break out when opportunity offered. Also that it was the answer to a natural law as immutable as the law of sex, akin to the survival of the fittest. Nature had peopled the world, in spots at first and then, by change of climate, by glaciers and upheavals, by the urge she had implanted in certain of the races, to go out, to fight, to conquer, to build up.

Those who have the idea that the talk of those others who go down to the sea in ships or wander about on the face of the earth like Ishmaels is larded ever with oaths, with smutty yarns and boasting tales, are very much mistaken. I have heard talks in midnight watches that were full of meat, keen with the desire to know. I remember Menzies, a fighting devil when a scrap was on, on whom strong drink made no impression, save to render him a bit stubborn, a turned-down scholar of Glasgow University, scion of a worthy Scots family.

"Tak' me," he'd say. "Lang syne, some red-headed Danish pirate, or it might have been a Scandinavian, though I prefer the Dane, for I ha' sma' use for square-heads, ye ken, they havin' degenerated sadly since their Viking days, some horn-helmeted pirate lands, mind ye, ravaging and ravishing a pair Scot fishin' village. An' a lassie entangles his heart an' he remains. Yon's my ancestor, a fightin', fearless viking born of a lang line o' wanderers an' dare-devils, shackled at last by a blue-eyed lassie.

"Noo, step doon the generations. The Scot's village has become a toon. In it live the great - great - great - grandsons and grand-daughters o' my swashbucklin' ancestor. They are a' kirk folk, dour Presbyterians an' they are sellin' goods by the yard, thirty-sax inches, neither more nor less, at a good price.

"They are a' brocht up i' the odor o' sanctity, a stuffy sanctity. Their lives are bound by the catechism an' the collection-plate. To smile too much is to be sinful; to be natural, a crime. They're a' o' ane pattern, like so many reels o' cotton thread.

"But the red bluid is there a' the time. Hidden like a ruby i' a close-packed mountain o' unfeelin' granite. But there. Times

change an' a lad loves a lass overwe'el or he tak's a drap too much, or he plays cards an' rides i' automobiles. 'Up an' oot wi' the ne'er do weel,' they yell. Broom awa' the changeling. A'most the guidman looks suspicious at the guidwife. How could we ha' bred such a sinfu' soul? Awa' he gangs, to the de'il fo' the lack o' common sense an' a kind word. It was i' the bluid. An' here I am."

And I applied Li Yuen's teachings to the psychology of adventure. He had told me much in the eight hours I spent with him in Shanghai, texts of Gotama Buddha taken from his Books of Proverbs, called the Nakayas; simplified and chosen by Liu Yen. En Sue had been educated long before he came to an American college. There he studied our ways, to adopt or adapt, as it might seem wise. But his wisdom had been acquired at home.

"We worship our ancestors in China," Li Yuen had said, "because they are we and we are they. The soul is a conglomerate, made up of the traits of our forefathers. To us is given to develop and hand down the spirit to our posterity. A fearful and a wonderful responsibility. Environment may hamper or assist us at the first until our wills develop. But we can be the masters of our souls. Circumstance may guide our choice of the many leavens within us. Sometimes we are bewildered by their quantity until we find ourselves. That is why poets are born, not made. The child's will is not strong enough to control the ferment of emotions in his soul, and if the father does not know this truth, how may he be able to watch and help him to hand down a worthy immortality?"

"The power of our lenses, the quality of our reagents limit us, my son. While we may know there are harmful germs that cannot be filtered, while we still guess as to the functions of the animal body, we are as little children playing with an astrolabe. From generation to generation come down physical characteristics, so that we can say this is the son of Chang, who greatly resembles his great grandfather, Hong, in the shape of his nostrils, his ears, his skull, his length of limb, even to the mole between his shoulders. But who can say of

the seed of man this spermatozoon shall be that of a man or a woman, or a goat, or a rabbit, this shall be black, or brown, or yellow, or white, this a musician, this a warrior?"

"Not for all their biology. Yet they would cavil at a biology of the soul, of the spirit. It is like a man born blind who whines there are no stars. The soul is imperishable, the body passes. The diamond lives on amid the pulverized clay, the radium sends out its power through the ages while the matrix that contains it decomposes."

Remembering this, it seemed to me that the urge of adventure, the urge to write, to fight, to sing, are all easily explained. The doctrine suits me—even with its responsibilities. A biology of the spirit.

"How about women?" I had asked Li Yuen, and thought to puzzle him.

"Man throws down the strong strain of heredity," he answered. "Woman is pliant to the environment of the present. She is the crucible, the mold, the retort. And love is the mordant."

"Women have souls?"

"Can you doubt it, my son? And these are handed down as ours are. They are man's other half, his partner in immortality, in the harvesting of their mutual seeding. They should be well chosen.

"In China we have many women that we may have many sons. That is our custom, the custom of our ancestors. Not yours. But some day you will meet a woman whose soul has many traits that your soul has loved beforetimes and you will recognize her, and she you. That is my hope for you. There will be no mistaking. It is affinity. As when two poles approach the spark is born midway before they touch, so shall your loves be born. You may have to fight for her. Circumstance may be against you, but circumstance is a man-made, earthborn thing and the soul is God's. The soul laughs at circumstance."

After I had written these things out in my diary I wondered how I was going to change circumstance tucked away in that lighthouse in the middle of Melanesia. And I wondered if I was ever going to meet that sort of girl, my affinity. Li Yuen had

given that much-abused word a true significance.

No red-blooded chap can be shut up alone like I was without thinking of sex. I had met many girls, and with Kipling's Tommy, had learned about women from them; but, though I had lied valiantly at times and they doubtless had echoed me, I had never seen the one that held me. They had been just "girls," knowing I was a wanderer; all of us ships passing in the night.

Now I began to wonder if I should ever meet a woman who would be my partner in our immortality. I was not getting too psychical. Heaven knows I was physical enough to be sorry for St. Anthony.

I have set these things down that may be accounted rubbish, because they are part of my human document and because, during that hermit year, I fancy I crawled a bit out of the chrysalis of my self-complacency.

And then Fortune fell out of the sky and I was awake.

Really it came up out of the sea, but it amounts to the same thing. I have said I had a boat—and nowhere to go in it. It was May, in the last month of my job and the end of the rains. There had been five months of them with slap of wind and water on the glass, squalls blowing, rain hissing, and everything going moldy if you didn't constantly overhaul it. For the past two weeks there had been occasional patches of fine weather.

I went to bed moody, feeling sodden, and woke up with a new sense of exhilaration. Through my window the sun was laughing and tickling the red godling in the ribs. I slept naked those muggy nights, and I went out on the gallery as I was into the glory of the morning.

The air was full of sweet savors, the winds retreated to wonderful caverns of pearl where the clouds were piled up in the south. The sea was one great wash of deep ultramarine up to the verge of the reefs. There were no whitecaps, just a toss of white mane here and there. The waves had been freshly faceted overnight and flashed back sapphire dazzles to the sky. On the reefs the water ran the color of the jade dragons on En Sue's gun, aerated like cham-

pagne where the rocks teased it into foam. A school of porpoises rolled like a lot of sea-puppies, and far out a whale spouted.

I sang. I had got into the habit of talking to myself. You do. And I warbled for the same reason that a gull squawked at me as it went by at my level.

"Yo, ho, my lads, the wind blows free!
My home is on the bounding sea;
And soon across the waters clear
My gallant bark will proudly-y steer
Oh, who will sail for—"

Then I caught sight of a boat floating leisurely along. I thought it mine, or rather the property of the lighthouse, and watched it with some anxiety as it swung in on the tide that was just making.

It bumped gently against a reef, swerved and turned into a channel, down which it sauntered unhelmed, and I saw that I could go down and retrieve it without much difficulty. It was still some way off, and the sea dazzle made distracting play about it. But I soon discovered it was no boat of mine, but larger, trimmer in its lines.

It came joggling leisurely along until I could look down and into it. What I saw made me dash down through the lantern-chamber and living-room to the ladder that led to the half-covered reefs. The bottom of the boat held two feet or more of bilge, slopping from side to side as the boat bobbed on the tide or struck a reef-rock gently. In this swash lay the body of a man, face down, naked above a pair of dungarees. A second man was in the stern sheets, collapsed, his shoulders slightly raised, his head sunk on his chest, his long legs trailing over a thwart and one tightly clenched fist stuck up above the gunwale.

CHAPTER V.

THE GREAT RUBY.

I GOT hold of the boat and inched it up between the ledges on which the lighthouse was built. These were uncovered at ordinary flood, when it was calm weather. And I took a closer inspection of that floating coffin. It was not pleasant to contemplate. They had been dead for several

days and had apparently been close to starving, though a swifter fate had taken them. The rain, in a way, had helped to preserve them. At least, it had not accomplished what equal hours of sun would have done. Equally it had kept them from the sharks.

I had come down without breaking my fast. After looking over those pulped, wrinkled remnants I did not care for any food, but I went up and got some rubber-soled shoes on, a singlet, and a pair of pants. I did this from some idea of decency and respect before the dead, I imagine, because I didn't need them otherwise. And, for the first time in several months I wished I had a good slug of brandy. When I came to the lighthouse I left all intoxicants off my list.

It was quite a little while before I made up my mind to go down again and carry out the obsequies. But they had to be buried, and it was distinctly up to me to do that and find out what I could about the poor devils.

I wasn't so sorry for them after I got through. They had both committed murder. I knocked out the plug and let the boat drain off first of all. There was a nasty-looking knife on the bottom boards, rusted thick. The man in the stern-sheets, an ugly brute with none of death's softening about his features, had a red club beard and a broken nose. All he wore was a pair of denim pants faded to a blotchy greenish-blue. His feet were naked, and there were no toes on his left foot. It was an old scar and looked as if some one had spaded them neatly off. Just under his floating ribs, on the left-hand side, hidden at first to me by the wrinkles of his bloated carcass, was a knife wound, pallid-lipped and ghastly. The rains had washed away all traces of the blood that had drained out. It was such a wound as might not have killed the man for several hours, but his posture looked like a swift collapse, and I figured that all out presently.

When I turned over the body of the second man his face was—horrible! It had been soaking for days, and the death that he had met was not calculated to compose his features. For he had been strangled. The prints of fingers were plain on his

putty-colored, corded neck. Foul play on both sides. For what?

The answer lay in that clenched hand sticking up on an arm, the post mortem stiffness of which had been reduced to a wabby pose, like that of a length of rope held upright. I almost missed it at first. It was not until I had taken a couple of empty oil-drums and attached them to both pairs of ankles, half filling the drums with water for better weighting; not until I had rowed the remains in their own boat to deep water and was ready to consign them overboard, that I tumbled to the fact there might be something in those stiffened fingers.

I was sick, stomach and soul, of the job long before then, but I went at the grisly work determined to go through with all of it, holding that half-stiff arm inboard between my knees while I pried at the tense digits.

The sun was bright above us, and as I managed to part the second and third fingers, I got a flash of something so fiercely crimson that I let go the dead hand. It was a jewel, and no ordinary jewel. The tragedy that had been enacted flashed before me. The throttled man had possessed the knife, or got possession of it, while the other drowsed. He had sprung and stabbed, lower than he had meant, perhaps. I think he must have held the gem, but had been afraid of the red-bearded one, much the more powerful man of the two. Perhaps he merely hated to share the proceeds. And then, despite his wound and swiftly ebbing strength, the red-bearded one had flung himself upon the other, choked him senseless, taken the gem and fallen back in his own last convulsion. The other, tumbled face-downward, unconscious, in the bilge, must have drowned unless the life had not been actually choked out of him.

I worked out the jewel with a thole-pin at last, and for a moment its blazing beauty lay on the palm of my hand. Then I thrust it into my pocket, anxious to get rid of my company. I had been muddling over in my mind what sort of prayer I might say, thinking it hardly right to release them to the sharks without some ritual. But now I gave up that idea, got one drum at

a time on the gunwale, arranged each body for one beastly moment in my arms and then let go. They rushed to the ten-fathom bottom with almost incredible speed, towed by the heavy drums, leaving a wash of aeration and strings of bubbles from the filling containers that disappeared before I shipped oars and tugged back to the light.

There had been no tattoo marks on them, nothing of much distinction, save that sheared-off foot. What I had found I put down in my diary. The boat was well built and looked more like a yacht's tender than an ordinary davit pendant. A name had been painted on the bows, but this had been deliberately scraped away. All I could make out—and I was not absolutely certain of that, was Z—EA.

There seemed to have been seven letters in the name, of which I had the first, fourth and last. But, puzzle as I might, I could not think of any name that would fit that. And the lettering was in good Roman.

I dismissed that after I had trimmed and filled and polished and swept, had a dip in my rock-bath and, at last, something to eat. I was pretty tired and I sat down before Changwu, the godling, whom I had left to guard the jewel, and took the gem up again.

Fortune unawares! I did not know much about rubies or about gem values, but it was plain to see that this ruby had been most exquisitely cut and was of unusual size. I knew that with increasing size and accompanying clarity, the price of such jewels could not be calculated by ordinary methods. A ruby like this, being already cut, must have a history.

Right there I brought myself up with a round turn. It was not mine! Palpably it had not belonged of right to either of those brutish-faced men of the boat. And it did not belong to me!

It seemed that its color faded as the thought went home. Here was fortune indeed, but not my fortune. I had merely found some one else's and must restore it to him. The godling seemed to grin at me as if to say: "Hard luck, and none of my bringing."

I put the thing down and looked up rubies in the encyclopedia. It didn't tell

me much about values, but I gathered that this great crystal of alumina, of a red transparent variety of corundum, was the most valuable of gem stones, that it had probably been found in the Mogok District of Eastern Mandalay and, to my eyes, seemed the best tint of pigeon's blood. It lay on my table with the afternoon sun touching it, sending out auroralike rays while something inside kept saying:

"Don't be a fool, Ned Kennedy. It might be worth thousands of dollars, ten, twenty, fifty! Are you going to chuck that away and spend more trying to find out to whom it belongs. It came to you—out of the sea. It's yours. Look at it, the color of wine, of blood, of love, of life. That's what it is, crystallized, concentrated life. Yours!"

I shoved the thing away finally, out of sight, in the little lacquered box the godling had arrived in. It was hardly large enough to contain it, and I had to take out En Sue's folded verse. I went out on the gallery, where soft breezes were now blowing. To-morrow, or a week from to-morrow—for the Dutch packets were not fussy about schedule—my relief would come. I should have to explain the boat. But I decided I would not explain about the ruby. I knew my Orient too well. The jewel would be promptly preempted, and that would be the end of it as far as the real owner, or myself, or any one but certain high Dutch officials was concerned. It would be swallowed up in investigation.

I lit my pipe and lay in my hammock. The wind was like satin to my face and cooling. My fever of excitement died down little by little. How did I know the thing was flawless, after all? I had probably vastly exaggerated its value. It might be off color. I made up my mind to submit it to Lung Hi, and if it was really of great worth, ask Li Yuen about it. I began to wish I had never seen it. It proved that my philosophy was only a veneer, not a saturation. For the zest and the lust for all the old things had come back to me as the red eye of the jewel had winked in the sun. I wanted wine and women and song and boon companions. I craved the fleshpots. But I sobered down after a while, with the ruby shut up in the box.

To look at it was to succumb to a certain hypnosis, to see the red beat of the pulse of life and covet it.

Toward sunset I went in to my lamps after one last sweep of the horizon. Only the dim amethyst cone of Great Natuna showed above sea level. Night descended with a rush, star after star joined in the eager race to display its light, the Southern

Cross swung just above the lighthouse, and my own lamps joined the display, keeping vigil over a lonely sea. I left the ruby in the little box and turned in without looking at it again, but I did not sleep well. Changwu's cheerful smile had turned sardonic, I dreamed, and mocked me, asking, "What are you going to do about it, Kennedy?" And I couldn't answer.

(To be continued NEXT WEEK.)

The Gentle Art of Banditting



by Lyon Mearson

AFTER an absence of a few weeks I dropped into the drivers' room of the Colorado Motor Stagecoach Company—a company which operates giant automobile stages between points in Colorado where no railroad has as yet penetrated.

If I expected an uproarious greeting after my absence, I was doomed to disappointment. Nobody was in the room but "Six O'Clock" Sullivan, so called because of his height and his general resemblance to the hands of a clock when in alinement. Six O'Clock—Six, for short—was wrapped in deep, impenetrable gloom. He looked up shortly as I entered, nodded abruptly, and returned to his meditations. I sat down next to him on the bench that ran around the wall. For a few minutes we sat in utter silence—I in patience and Six in the pall of his evil humors.

At length he spoke.

"The ways of life is strange, sir," he

remarked in a hollow voice, producing a match from his pocket and twirling it aimlessly.

I nodded acquiescence.

"There is nothing in life that has no relation to something else—nothin' stands absolutely alone—nothin' is good fer anything if it does stand alone. Am I right, or am I wrong, sir?" he asked morosely.

I indicated that there was truth on his side.

"Fer example, take this here match," he continued. "Alone, it don't do me no good except t' make my pocket smell of bum sulfur. Combined wit' a cigaret, however—" He trailed off into another moody silence.

I took out my cigaret-case, and he helped himself to a tailor-made cigaret.

"If I may say so, sir," he remarked after he had lighted it, "you kin understand a hint as quick as some people kin understand a kick in the slats."

He smoked for a while in contemplative silence. I was quiet, waiting for him to open up, which he would certainly do eventually. I was the best listener Six had, and I knew that he knew it. Given enough listeners, the world would be a happy place. The trouble is that most people want to do the talking themselves; generally when you notice a rapt look on the face of a man who is listening to you, it isn't an indication that he is interested—probably he is simply thinking of what he is going to say when you get finished talking.

"Wimmen is, in the main, pecooliar," he said at last. "I know some one has remarked on that subject before me—but anyways it's something that each man has to find out for himself, no matter how many people warns th' poor simp. Take a man, for instance.

"If you tell him what a holy wonder you are, it don't mean nothin' to him—you gotta prove it. But wit' wimmen it's all different; it's enough if you tell them you're a wonder; you don't have to prove nothin'; in fack, it's better if you don't. I don't charge you nothin' for dis here dissertation on the fine points about wimmen—you get your eddication here free, gratis, an' likewise for nothin'. Am I right, or am I wrong, as per usual?"

"I take it that you are referring to Delia, Six?" I asked.

He nodded.

"Not only to Delia, but also to Windy Sanderson," he came back morosely.

"Windy Sanderson?" I asked.

"P'raps you don't know the bird," he offered. "Ye've been away for a while, haven't you? He's one of our stage-drivers, come in a few weeks ago."

"Tall, well built, light hair, good-looking?" I asked.

He nodded, and replied: "He's all o' them things you mentioned—an' some I could mention, but won't, beggin' your pardon."

"I saw him just before I went away, but didn't have a chance to speak to him," I commented.

"You must 've gone away quick, then; you don't have to wait long for a chance

to speak to him; he takes good care of that."

"What about him and Delia?" I prompted. "Aren't things going as well between you and Delia as usual?"

He shook his head. "No, I kinnot say they are; an' what's more, they never did," he put in enigmatically. "Leastwise, not so well since this here guy Windy blew in, with that long tongue of hisn an' them good looks, which, all I kin say is, prob'ly covers an evil heart.

"I'm goin' to tell you about this guy, which the same is more or less of a secret, nobody knowin' anything about it except Bob Peters, Skinny Robertson, an' your 'umble servant—wit' Windy Sanderson himself knowin' only about half of it, the harmless half."

He threw away the butt of his cigaret and looked after it regretfully.

"Cigaretts is like life, isn't they, sir?" he offered. "Enjoy them for a little while, an' before you knows it they're finished—almost before ye've started the darn things. Am I right, or am—"

I took out my cigaret-case again, and left it out this time. "You're right, Six. Have a smoke."

"Thank you, I will, since you insist."

He helped himself to a cigaret again and puffed contentedly for a short space.

"Wimmen," he said at last, "is one of the worst of the sexes. Now, if it wuzn't for Delia, I'd like to have the whole female sex abolished an' have both sexes composed of men. It might—"

"You were saying something about Windy Sanderson and Delia," I interrupted to bring him back to the track of the story I knew was in the offing.

"So I wuz—so I wuz," he nodded. "Well, about Windy Sanderson. You see, Windy blew in, lookin' for a job as driver of one of these here busses. Old man Winters give him the job, prob'ly because Slim Anson just quit on 'im, but I guess he'd 'a' got the job anyways, if it wuz only because Winters wanted to git rid of him, he talked so much. He started talkin' then, an' you might say he hasn't stopped yet. He opened the mouth that was heard round the woild. He kin drive, of course, but there's none of

us who kinnot—I suppose man for man there isn't a better set of drivers in the country—leastwise, in Colorado.

"But talk! You oughtta hear this man Windy talk. Say, if talk wuz a drop of water, Windy 'd have the Pacific Ocean lookin' like a bottle of home brew, for quantity, to say nothin' about quality. The I's in his conversation look like the way telegraph poles look outta the windows of the Twentieth Century Limited when she's goin' good.

"There's nothin' this boy don't savvy, an' still less he won't talk about. He's the most popular guy in the woild, wit' himself, an' he don't hesitate to express his beliefs in them sentiments one hundred and fifty per cent of the time, if you're familiar wit' the higher mathematics, sir.

"I sez to him one day: 'Say, you an' Napoleon must 'a' had terrible hardships when you retreated from Moscowitch, or Petroburg, or whatever the name of that there Russian burg wuz.'

"'Why, what do you mean?' he asks, innocent like.

"'Nothin'—nothin' at all,' I says, 'except that if everything you told is straight goods, you must be old enough to have fought wit' Napoleon at Valley Forge.'

"'Naw—it just seems like that to you. A regular guy kin squeeze more things into a week than you dumbbells can do in a lifetime,' he says, not mad, but scornful like.

"You see how it wuz, sir. He wuz the original white-haired kid from White Plains, by which I mean he wuz a reg'lar heller. Well, that don't make him popular none wit' the men around here, but my! the wimmen soit'nly fell for him. Take Delia, for instance. If I tried to pull the line of talk that Windy did, I'd get bawled out proper, an' serve me right, too, says I. But Windy! Everything he said they takes for Gospel troot', an' that's what first got me sore about him.

"You kin see for yourself, I ain't got the appearance of a hero, an' I never claimed that I did much heroing—but this here Windy, why, he just looks the part. Big, blond, good-lookin', nice blue eyes—can you imagine how the ladies fall for him?

"An' the worst of it wuz that Delia falls for him harder 'n anybody else. I'll tell this here old woild that he sure made a hit wit' her. Which leaves me coolin' me tootsies somewheres on the outside, you might say. An' the yarns he pulls! Say, he told me about capturin' six bandits what tried to hold up a stage he wuz runnin' wunst—single-handed, mind you, an' wit'out a gun. Sez he'd 'a' got all seven of them if he hadn't been troubled wit' a bit of rheumatism that mornin'.

"Delia swallows this stuff, hook, line, an' tails, hollerin' for more all the time, an' so do the rest of the fool female sex in these parts, but the men is all sore at him because they can't shut him up none an' he's gettin' to be a national nuisance.

"An' on top of that, Skinny Robertson gits held up. Yep—reg'lar Wild West style. They ain't much of that hold-up stuff around here now—but wunst in a long time somebuddy gits to Jesse Jamesing. 'T'wan't much of a hold-up—only one passenger on the stage, an' he gits relieved of a tin watch an' a bit of dough, not much. Well, when Windy gits news of this, you should 'a' heard him holler. Kids the life outta poor Skinny, an' describes in detail as to how *he* would 'a' acted in the soicumstances.

"He goes pretty far wit' his kiddin', too, an' him an' Skinny come close to goin' to the mat, but when he sees that Skinny is gittin' good an' mad he lays off an' goes out, prob'ly to see Delia an' tell her all about it.

"Well, Skinny an' Bob an' I discusses him pro an' con, an' finally we decides he's gotta be suppressed for the good of the community. As for myself, when I says community I has Delia in mind, but that's neither here nor there, as the poet sez. We talks over lottsa plans, but didn't find no good one for a while. This Windy he's a pretty wise boid, an' it's gotta be a good scheme for him to fall. Then we sits silent for a while, jest thinkin' an' sayin' nothin'."

Six lapsed into silence for a minute as he carefully killed the butt of his cigaret with the heel of his heavy shoe.

"Funny how hard it is to git decent cig-

arets in these here parts," he said. "Now, them there cigarets of yourn—they come from the East, I suppose."

I nodded. "Go right to it, Six," I encouraged.

He lighted up another, and continued his narrative when he had got it going to his satisfaction, inhaling his puffs tremendously and blowing them out luxuriously through his nose and mouth simultaneously.

"To head off a man from braggin' you gotta hit him in his pride—in his conceit; that would 'a' been the only way to stop this man, anyway, an' I was thinkin' along them lines when the ideer came to me, jest outta the sky, you might say. Anyways, Skinny an' Bob seem to be kinda barren of ideers, so I springs mine, an' they took to it complete.

"The plan wuz simple, an' has been worked previous, but that don't hurt it none, so we decide. It wuz this: Since Windy's talkin' so much about what he'll do in case of a hold-up—why, we'll jest kinda give him one to play wit', an' see what he'll do wit' it.

"That wuz all. We aimed to get him down in Dead Man's Gulch, where the road is narrer an' he can't get by, tie him up good an' proper, gag an' all, an' drive the car in ourselves, makin' up some story about havin' scared the bandits off.

"Perfectly simple, you might say, wit' no chance of it's going wrong. You see, the psychology—I've been goin' into book learnin' a little lately, an' it's sure great stuff—the psychology, as I say, wuz all on our side.

"It's a psycho—psycho—psychological cinch that a man who's always braggin' about what he kin do will fall down hard in a pinch—the guys who does things hardly ever talk, unless they has to open their mouths to say, 'Gimme three cards,' or some other equally scientific an' innocent remark. We figured Windy wouldn't put up no fight to speak of—an' even if he did, we wuz three to one regardless of the fack that our six-guns was loaded wit' blanks. So it looked like a copper-plated cinch, as you might say.

"Bob an' Skinny wuz strong for the

plan, Skinny especially, an' I happens to think of this guy's stealin' Delia from me, jest at that moment, so I'm kinda strong on it myself. The ideer promised a lot of fun, anyway, an' we had got away with worse stuff than that around here an' never been canned, so we thought we'd give it a whirl.

"I guess most every man has an ideer that he knows more about the gentle art of banditting than Jesse James himself—he figures all he needs is the chance, an' he'd show the world what a real pirate wuz like. Jest like every female woman has an ideer she could be a movin' pitcher star if she only had a crack at it. I guess they could, too.

"Well, we decides to pull this stunt off next day. It's gettin' about dusk when Windy's chariot pulls into Dead Man's Gulch, if he's on time, an' he gener'ly is, so we figger he won't be able to recognize us none, what wit' the excitement an' the growin' darkness.

"We're there on time the next day, all dolled up like any bandit that ever banditted, an', if I must say it myself, we looked pretty bloodcurdling, wit' our nice masks an' six-guns.

"We proceeded to block up the road wit' stones an' logs, so as Windy's simply gotta stop, whether he's a mind to or not, an' then settled ourselves as comfortable as possible in the bushes at the side of the road to await future developments.

"We didn't have long to wait, because developments began to develop right away, an' these here developments wuzn't none that wuz on the program neither. Three shadows fell over us while we wuz a sitting there, an' a voice behind us sez:

"'Well, well, if this don't look like competition!'

"We whirls, an' you kin believe me when I tells you we seen the real stuff there. No make-believe hold-up about them three—we looked kinda like stage villains, alongside of them. We had butted into a real hold-up, that's all.

"'Stick 'em up!' says the leader, all three coverin' us wit' them wicked-lookin' guns. 'Reach up for the sky—grab a star!'

"Say, I guess none of us ever got our hands up quicker in the whole course of our lives—sort of a reflex action, if you know what I mean, sir. Our hands shot up an' stayed up.

"The leader looks over the logs an' stones blockin' the road approvingly. 'It's very decent of you gentlemen to save us the trouble,' he remarks while the other two is tyin' us up an' gaggin' us. 'But you're too young to embark on a life of crime, so just lie there at the side of the road like good little boys an' we'll show you how it had ought to be did. An' we won't charge you nothin' neither, except these here few paltry valuables which we has relieved from your person.'

"Well, of outside the fact that we lost our personal belongin's, which wuzn't much, anyway, the situation could 'a' been worse. Windy wuz goin' to git his hold-up, all right, but it wuz goin' to be the real thing, an' not no dress rehearsal. We wuz pretty well tied up, an' gagged, but managed to inch up to the bushes where we could see the whole show an' not be seen none ourselves whatever.

"Pretty soon along comes Windy wit' his bus hittin' on all six. The highwaymen jumps out on the road, one on each side to handle the driver, an' one in back to take care of the passengers. He sees them an' the barricade acrost the road, an' jams on his brakes hard, stoppin' right in front of the obstruction.

"Right there is where trouble begins—an' I must say that in all my time I ain't never yet seen anything human as quick as that there Windy. He seems to slump down in his seat, for some reason or other; prob'ly scared, the robbers figure, I guess. They jumps on the runnin' board to see what's the matter wit' him, an' Windy's foot comes up so quick I could hardly see it. That brogan catches one of the highwaymen right at the side of the jaw an' lays him out for ten minutes. He drops like a log.

"The other one is about to shoot, but he ain't quick enough, I'll tell the wold. Windy's hand—wit' a heavy monkey wrench at the end of it—catches him right on the bean, an' the subsequent proceed-

ings don't interest him none for a good long time. Seeing somethin' is bein' pulled off in front that he don't know nothin' about, the third hold-up man springs for the front end of the bus without stoppin' to think, I guess.

"Anyway, he doesn't git no further chance to think, because Windy is all over him in an instant, battin' him on the bean wit' his wrench an' takin' his gun away from him, all the while insultin' him somethin' scandalous.

"The passengers piled out by this time, an' they tie up these here so-called bandits, clear the road, an' Windy drives into town an' delivers them at the calaboose all in regular form. Say, does that bird own the town? I'll say he does! He's a hero yet. The town gets up a purse for him, an' the newspaper gives him a send-off that would make Pershing himself proud. The company gives him a reward an' raises his wages, an' as for Delia, why, she simply goes crazy over him.

"Say, it does beat all, don't it, how every wunst in a while some one steps up an' hands old lady psychology a neat but not gaudy jolt in the bread basket. That there Windy wuz all doped out to be as yellow as they make 'em—an' what happens? Nothin', except that he becomes a hero, an' I have a hell of a chance wit' Delia now.

"An' at that, it ain't so bad as it might 'a' been," he continued dryly. "Them there bandits got one gosh-awful maulin'. Why, jest suppose it had 'a' really been us—"

"That's just who I thought it was," said a voice at the window behind us.

We turned.

It was Windy himself, looking up at us languidly.

"You see," he said, "I knew all about the plot—I heard the three of you gettin' it up. Otherwise—"

We were all silent for a moment.

"But I guess we won't none of us say anything about it, will we?" he said finally. "I wouldn't if I were you." He looked significantly at Six.

"M-m-m!" said Six. "You're right, as usual. Have a cigaret."



The Blood Call

Part II
by *Kenneth Perkins*

Author of "The Bull-Dogger," etc.

WHAT HAS ALREADY HAPPENED

UNDER the tutelage of Big Bess Quade, his grandmother, Jim Quade becomes a skilful, two-fisted fighter and an expert with a six-gun. Big Bess has trained him since he was a small child, and now that he has reached maturity and been thoroughly tested, she informs him of the murder of his beloved brother, Sterry Quade, by one Smoo Taurog, cattle-rustler, bad man, killer. The blood-call summons Jim to the West to "get" Taurog and even up the old score. He no sooner arrives on the edge of Taurog's impenetrable kingdom than he discovers that lawless gentleman about to descend with his gang upon a helpless rancher who has defied him. Afraid of Taurog, the cowboys have all deserted the rancher, leaving him alone with his weak old father, two women and a small baby. Jim at once sets out, as he boldly announces, to meet Taurog. He reaches the ranch, the Tumbling L, just before the raiders, while the rancher is preparing his bold, but futile, defense. When the rancher learns that Jim is Sterry Quade's brother he grasps his hand and they vow to wipe out Taurog's rule. But even now Taurog's henchmen are riding madly up the road, bent on burning the ranch buildings and terrifying its owner.

CHAPTER VII.

THE CONSERVATIVE JUG TRILLES.

TAUROG'S gang had left on their long ride for the Larkey ranch early that afternoon. At about three o'clock they rode at an extended trot across the long sage-plain bordering the southern side of Larkey's outfit.

Smoo Taurog himself led the troop. He was mounted on a black mustang which pranced and frothed under the close hand of its master. Smoo's huge torso was rigid, his broad shoulders giving no evidence of the horse's movement. From his waist down, however, he was supple and seemed to move with every undulation of the horse's flanks and back and withers. From his waist down he was a part of the animal;

from the waist up he was a bronzelike giant. He had low brows, slits of steel-gray eyes, a throat and hairy chest showing through a partly opened shirt.

But Taurog's claim to greatness lay not in those steel-gray eyes or that powerful chest: it was his fists. Those chunky, iron-like fists, rusty with freckles, moldy with scars—those were the symbols of Taurog's power. A .33 or a double-action .48 had been the scepter of the power of some men. Then the law made that power uncertain and precarious. Finally came a man who could rule a range without his six-gun. Smoo Taurog knew that as long as he could make men fear his fists—and as long as he could handle those fists as he did once when he killed a Mexican—he would be king.

This story began in the *Argosy-Allstory Weekly* for January 14.

His lieutenant was an old man, a deputy sheriff, by the name of Jug Trilles, well versed in the ways of cattle-country living. He was a little figure, low-crouched over the withers of his pinto. He had a pair of sharp, brown eyes peering furtively from under the sombrero's rim, a grizzled beard, and wrinkled, sharply set lips.

The others were an unshaven lot of renegades riding with a hard hand and a rough-and-tumble saddle. All wore sombreros, bandannas to save their necks from burning and chapping, and leather or sheepskin chapareras for the rough rides of the sage-country. Three old cow-men, several cholos—half-breed Yuman and white—a Mexican by the name of Juan Scaly, and a negro: this was the crew which Taurog picked for his punitive expeditions.

When they were within three miles of their destination, they were met by one of their scouts who brought news to Taurog of the conditions at the Larkey ranch. The last ranch-hand had deserted, so the scout said.

"And Souse McCabe—their foreman—how about him?" Taurog asked.

"He was the first to go."

"He's the only one in the whole gang that can shoot. Larkey is too old. If it's only him and his women folk there I can't see that we're goin' to have much of a fight."

"A good thing, chief," little old Trilles said. "We can't let this fight get too spectacularlike. Folks up to Mule City are watchin' you. If they's any resistance other ranchers will begin to buck."

"Thar ain't goin' to be no resistance," Smoo Taurog smiled grimly.

"I gather from one of his cow-men," the scout said, "that Ross Larkey is going to stick it out and kill any man what sets foot on his ranch."

Taurog scratched his great jaw.

"I myself ain't going to mix in with this fight," he said suddenly. His men who had gathered their horses in a ring about him stared open-mouthed. "And I'll tell you why?" he hastened to explain. "Ross Larkey is there alone and with a bunch of women folk, and he's got to be punished—punished right. If it's spread around the

range that I raided him while he was alone I'll begin to lose my rep."

"There's some sense to that," little old Jug Trilles put in.

Taurog went on: "Now I'm goin' back to Lava—and I'll set in to a game at cards there while this here fight is goin' on, and then every one 'll know that I wasn't present. They'll know dam' well that it was my orders that the ranch gets burned, but they won't be callin' me a coward."

"You're right thar," Jug Trilles said. "Nobody dast call Smoo Taurog a coward."

"But now look here, men," Taurog raised his voice and pointed to each man. "Just because I ain't goin' into the fight with you don't mean that you ain't got a good job afore you. I want Ross Larkey made a example of. Get that? I want his cattle spread all over the country, and I want every shack, pen, cow-shed, and vat on his whole ranch burned to the ground. I've got it all fixed up with Sheriff Matlock that you won't get blamed. He's goin' to say that Larkey shot at one of you men for tryin' to pass through his cañon. And then the story will go that Jug Trilles follered to argufy with him and got some more shootin' for a answer. Then we'll say the nigger here was drunk, an' started shootin' back. A fight comes off and Larkey and his effects gets wiped out. Jug Trilles, you're to lead this expedition."

"I'll see that your instructions is carried out, chief," Jug said. "But if Larkey meets up with any success in buckin' us I ain't goin' to vouch for the Mule City ranchers that are waitin' for a chance to start a revolution ag'in' you!"

"Jug, all you have to do is to win! Give the women a scare—you know what I mean—and the baby kid. Damned little brat—he'll grow up and be after us for what we done to his home—mark my words. That's what always happens. Kids had orter be shot off quicker than men folks. You can take care of the men folks, but you never know when these damned kids are going to get into long pants and chaps and come tround axin' you to explain!"

Taurog yanked off a hunk of tobacco, revolved it about his mouth, showing dog's

teeth. The men were silent as he looked into each face. When the tobacco was made into a good cud, he wheeled his horse and rode off toward the south.

"He's right," little old Jug Trilles said when a cloud of alkali covered up the exit of the chief. "One of you guys will be delegated to throw a scare into the women folk." The little deputy ran his eye around the circle of brown, unshaven faces. "How about you, Juan?"

Juan Scaly grinned through big white teeth. He was a sinuous animal of a Mexican, with long arms and spider fingers. Jet hair lay over his low forehead as far as the prominent cheek-bones. The grin was not a pleasant one; it made two long wrinkles across his cheek from the blue underlids of his eyes to the undershot jaw.

"Count on me, *señor*," Juan Scaly said. "I am your slave!"

The troop advanced, this time at a slow trot, their horses churning up a light but choking screen of alkali. Men and mounts became hot, sweating, irritable, and thirsty.

A mile from the ranch they deployed. The negro and two other riders were ordered to attack the ranch from the creek. The remaining seven would advance in a widely extended skirmish line. As soon as this deployment was accomplished, Jug Trilles caught his first sight of a strange rider galloping down the county road from the east, and making for the creek on the eastern border of the ranch. He immediately assembled his men. Juan Scaly advised sending for Smoo Taurog again.

"He left us to fight one man, *señor*—now there are two."

Trilles laughed his shrill, chuckling old man's laugh. "You've got a good strain of Mex in you, Juan. For that I've a mind to send you packin' into the ranch. A little lead in the belly would let out some of that Mex blood."

But Trilles sensed the immediate difference in the morale of all his men. An attack in broad daylight upon a house with only one opponent was a sure thing—even though it might mean the death of several men. But an attack against a house with two men was a different matter. They all knew this.

Trilles was old and sharp and conservative. "We'll wait till dark," he said.

The men retired to a little arroyo which was cut into the side of the hills at the very gate of the ranch. Here they dismounted, loosened the cinches of their horses, and lay down in the shade to wait. According to Taurog's law no man was allowed to drink from his hip-flask until a few minutes before a fight. Jug Trilles, who made a very careful analysis of the present situation, ordered every man to surrender his flask. He went around and made the collection.

"I'll give this stuff back to you when the time comes," he said.

For three hours the men waited, chewing at their tobacco-cuds and rolling innumerable cigarettes. Their conversation centered mainly about the question of the man whom they had seen riding into Larkey's ranch.

"Probably one of the old cow-hands changed their mind and went back—thinkin' of the skirts what was left to our mercy," one of the men suggested.

"It waren't Souse, anyway," another man put in. "Souse was seen up to Mule City blabbin' about Taurog's threat and sayin' he wouldn't come back to the ranch for love or money. I figure old Larkey sent him to Mule City for help—but every one was afeered to help in a fight ag'in' Taurog. They ain't a rancher in the county would come to Larkey's help. He'd orter knowed that. I reckon they all told him he could shag out and save himself—and his family—instead of buckin' Taurog and callin' for help!"

"No, they ain't no one fool enough to mess into Taurog's fights," old Trilles said.

"But how about this horseman that came back?" Juan asked suavely.

"If he's a ranch-hand belongin' to Larkey he ain't to be afeered of. They ain't been no gunmen hirin' out at Larkey's so fur as I can remember."

"For the matter of that," said Jug Trilles, "there ain't been no gunmen on the whole range since the old days when Peter Belge was here—old Fat Peter Belge—he was so sharp at the buckhorn sight that he hired out with a circus. Went to Coney Island and got famous sharpshootin'!"

"I remember old Fat Belge," another of the gang said. "Used to work on the Quade ranch. Do you remember the Quade ranch? Was a bird there called Sterry Quade—he could throw a gun better as any circus show-boy I ever seen. Double action never unsteadied that boy's hold, I'll tell you. And there weren't no trigger pull too heavy."

"But he got plugged, as I remember," Juan laughed.

"Sure, that's the last I ever heard tell of that Quade ranch. Thar was the old grandma—Big Bess Quade. And as I remember, there was a little kid brother. Sterry Quade used to spend hours with that kid perfectin' his grip and his trigger-finger and his eye."

Jug Trilles had been watching the sun, figuring certain important points in his mind. When the evening came and there was little left of the light of the day except a few red streaks over the purple mesa above them, Trilles gave his men his final orders. The negro and two others were to attack by the creek, as previously planned. Pedro was told to ascend the mesa, and then climb down the cliffs unmounted and rush one of the western windows of the house. This was a possible attack at night time when his form could scarcely be seen against the adobe background. Jug Trilles and the five remaining men were to attack from the plain, retaining their mounts and charging when Jug ordered.

An hour after sunset Jug Trilles took up his sombrero and passed it around to his men. The old deputy had carefully timed the effects of whisky in other fights. Each man took his flask and drank.

"Taurog has give orders," Jug said, "and for to perform his orders a man needs a few good slugs. Burn the place, stampede the brutes—and another little drink!"

CHAPTER VIII.

TRILLES OBEYS ORDERS.

UPON the arrival of Jim Quade at Larkey's ranch it was quite obvious that the attack had been postponed.

"They'll wait for the dark," Larkey said.

"And then we're going to have a different game on our hands."

"How many are there?" Quade asked.

"About ten."

"That's easy. Might as well put in the time between now and dark with a good meal—for if you don't mind my sayin' so, Mr. Larkey—I'm starved."

"We'll have the lady put on a good chuck of beef," Larkey said. "The gals has went to their room to primp up as soon as they seen you comin'!"

Larkey introduced his old father-in-law. Grandpa Bob had scarcely suffered from the suspense of the situation. But when he saw the towering form of Jim Quade he showed the first signs of apprehension.

"Be you the raider?" he asked shrilly.

"You remember the old Quade outfit, Grandpa Bob?" Larkey said. "And remember Sterry Quade who used to could shoot the ace when a royal flush was throwed in the air?"

"If he's so pesky slick with his gun how is it you let him in here?" the old man asked. "Thought you was goin' to fight?"

"This is the brother of old Sterry Quade. Don't you remember old Sterry Quade?"

"I remember Big Bess Quade," grandpa said. "A fine gal that. Poured hot water on my haid for serenadin' her with a harmoniky!"

"This here gent's her grandson."

"I don't believe it!" the old man snapped. "Sterry Quade's been dead ten years. He's stringin' you."

"It's Sterry's kid brother growed up."

Sue Larkey brought her little brother in from his hiding-place in the kitchen. Sue had powdered her burned nose, and had applied a red ribbon to her frizzly, dandelion coiffure. Her darkened lips called forth a remark from Grandpa Bob to the effect that she should not eat cherries so soon before dinner.

"Aren't we goin' to play hide-and-seek any more?" the brother asked. He held a scrambling kitten under one arm and a sleepy, bleary-eyed puppy under the other. "I want to hide in the wood-box."

Lady Larkey came in, her big, flat face powdered like a sugar doughnut. She fell in love with Jim Quade at first sight and

did not hesitate to make her feelings known. She was going to cook a feast for the "hero" as elaborate as any ever dished out on the ranch—since their marriage. Her hero was going to get a taste of everything from sliced pomelos to canned peaches and tortas.

While Lady Larkey prepared the dinner her husband and Jim Quade kept watch at the window, and from time to time made the rounds of the cow-sheds. Sue kept every one's spirits up by playing old tunes on the little reed organ in the sitting-room, accompanied by Grandpa Bob with his harmonica.

The lookout at the window was changed periodically while the family ate dinner. Quade, true to his promise, filled himself unreservedly with Mexican beans, Indian figs, beef, boiled potatoes, and the dessert which Lady Larkey had prepared: torrijas—a tasty concoction of bread fried in wine and eggs.

The great relief which the family experienced upon the advent of Quade began to give way to a tensivity of waiting as the sun set. Sue could no longer cheer them with her music because of Larkey's orders that the place must be kept quiet so that sounds in the vicinity would be audible. The rancher placed watches at other windows and made the final rounds of his cow-sheds. When he ascertained that the raiders were not yet anywhere in sight, he proceeded to hang jack-lamps at a distance of about fifty feet around the main ranch-house—one on each end of the picket line, one on the calf-pen, the bunk-house, the rain-barrel, and the watering-trough. When he returned he ordered that all the lights in the main ranch-house where they were to hide be put out.

At about an hour after sunset Jim Quade, watching at the front window, reported a string of riders—dark and almost indistinct—moving slowly across the sand and disappearing in the patches of black sage. The riders were far apart—perhaps a hundred yards, so that Quade knew that the attack was liable to fall upon the house at ten different places. It was Quade who first suggested a different mode of defense.

To the west of the ranch-house, at a dis-

tance of perhaps fifty paces, there was a little shake-barn. This was built on a small rise of ground and would enable a watchman to command the ground behind the picket line. If the raiders approached the ranch-house, thinking they could use the picket lines of horses for a protection, they would first have to storm the shake-barn.

Quade told the rancher of this plan.

"You can stay here in the ranch-house with the girls and the kid and old Grandpa Bob. The girls can fire as soon as you give them the word. Shots coming from every window in the house will put up a good appearance, even if they don't take effect. I can hide in the shake-barn and open fire at the men who attack the front of the house."

When Quade had left for his post Larkey arranged his defense of the main ranch-house. Grandpa Bob was told to stay in the kitchen with the little boy. It was the safest place in the house, and opened toward the box-cañon and the herd. No attack was expected from that quarter. Sue took her post in the western wing of the house facing the cliffs of the mesa. These were close at hand, and with the gathering brilliancy of the starlight, the adobe banks defined the clumps of scrub oaks and chaparral a sharp black. Ross Larkey and his wife stayed in the front room watching out of separate windows.

They watched for the space of half an hour before Larkey descried the men who were now dismounted and crawling across the rattleweed and brush. The sombreros were gray and distinctly visible in the blue starlight, and later in the yellow light of the lanterns. They came in a big semicircle, and reminded Ross Larkey of a scythe mowing at the gate of his ranch. He lifted his gun and peered down the sight, but knew that to fire at that distance and with that uncertain visibility was useless. His wife pestered him with questions.

"Why don't you give us the word to fire?" she asked. "If you don't start soon we'll all have our throats cut. Why didn't you let Jim Quade stay in here and be our captain? He's got some sense."

The scythe had crossed the gate of the cattle-proof fences at the lower end of the

ranch, and the men had again dropped to the weeds, revealing only their sombreros.

"If you don't shoot now I'll start the fireworks myself," Lady Larkey grumbled. And her threat was not a vain one. As soon as the men had wiggled their way up the hill until they were on a line with the shake-barn where Jim Quade was waiting Lady Larkey fired, the gun kicking into her shoulder so that she stumbled back and fell over a chair.

Ross Larkey then followed with half a dozen shots aimed as accurately as he could at the sombreros. He had no way of knowing whether they had taken effect. The only reaction from his enemy was a sudden burst of reports in six flashing streaks. The lanterns in the yard were smashed out, but Larkey knew by the shots the approximate locality of a good number of the attackers. He had judged there were ten in all—though he could not be certain of this. They might have been joined by others during the three hours wait. At all events there were four men lurking about whom he had not yet accounted for.

After that first fusillade had crashed the window-glass above him, and ripped into the ceiling, there was a moment's silence. Lady Larkey was the next to fire. She poked the muzzle of her gun out of the window and banged at random into the air.

"You've killed one of our own nags!" Larkey cried. "Damned if I thought you could even do that good!"

One of the rangy little pintos on the picket line kicked and fell, emitting a panic-stricken neigh. The other broncos began to kick at each other's barrels, the thudding sound of the hoofs making the only break in the stillness. They continued pawing and kicking, and one after another stampeded and broke loose, galloping off toward the cow-corral, the hay-stalls or the open plain.

In this confusion the attackers crept up another twenty feet, fired at the lamps and lay low upon their stomachs. Larkey and his wife both fired continuously. Old Grandpa Bob, trembling and white, crept from the kitchen and crawled underneath the sofa, gibbering in his panic and begging Larkey to save him from the outlaws.

But Larkey had troubles of his own.

"Why the hell don't Jim Quade shoot?" he cried desperately. "If he waits another minute there'll be ten men rushin' in on us."

Meanwhile Sue was at her post in the western wing of the house. From the window where she stood she could see the shake-barn. The knowledge that Jim Quade was there gave her a sense of security. She even began to think that there was no probability of any attack on this side of the house, when she saw the dim black figure of a man against the adobe bluffs high up near the crest of the mesa.

One of the men, she concluded, had ridden up to the mesa, had dismounted and was now climbing down for an attack upon her wing. At the same moment the men attacking the front of the house had passed the shake-barn. Sue could only see the flank of this line of attackers, but she knew that Quade could open fire now if he chose to. She wondered why he was waiting so long. The hoarse barking of the guns around by the front of the house was dining in her ears, and she knew that her father and mother were both firing. The flash of guns from two of the attackers was also visible. She looked again at the cliff and saw that the little figure had swung down almost a third of the way. In the starlight he looked like a black spider slowly crawling down an invisible skein.

Sue lifted her gun and fired. The bluffs threw back the echo of her shots, and she could hear the rolling of stones. The black form had merged into the protection of the brush. Sue waited, and presently she saw the figure again. She fired, and again the shots reechoed confusingly, and rocks rolled down almost to her very window. The "spider" disappeared again in a more extensive background of chaparral. This time she waited for an eternity before he reappeared. The black bear-brush extended almost to the foot of the bluffs and Sue knew that when she next saw the spider he would emerge into the open, almost within a hundred yards of her window.

In the yard outside the horses which had broken from the picket line were running aimlessly from shed to corral, catch-pen to snubbing-post. They loped across Sue's

line of sight so that she could not keep a constant lookout for the man on the cliff. When four of the horses trotted in front of her window and wheeled frantically at the sound of the shooting in front of the house and fled, Sue could see the spider running across the narrow stubble-covered yard from the bear-brush toward her window. The attackers in the front of the house had crawled up and were on all sides. Three of them were running toward the door of the house.

Sue screamed, praying that Quade would open fire. She raised her gun frantically, but the spider leaped from the shadow of the house, and caught the barrel as she pulled the trigger. Her shot went wild into the air, and the man scrambled up to the sill.

It was then that Jim Quade, from the strategic seclusion of the shake-barn, started to fire.

CHAPTER IX.

THE HELL-BENDER.

FOR a few moments before Quade chose to play his hand the ranch was the scene of the wildest confusion. Dogs barked and yelped from every corner, horses galloped wildly from one side of the ranch to the other, and the milling herd began a frantic bawling. Jug Trilles and his men hurled a drumfire of shots at every window within range. And their fire was returned by old Ross Larkey, who had discarded his shotgun for a revolver, and was emptying his chambers as fast as he could pull the trigger.

In the house the confusion was as great as the mêlée outside. Old Grandpa Bob crawled from his sofa when a bullet splintered into one of the sofa legs. He jumped out, begging Larkey to call a truce with the murderers, but a shot crashed into a picture above him and sent the old man packing into the kitchen, where he scrambled frantically into the wood-box with his little grandson.

Old Ross Larkey, having emptied the magazines of two revolvers, fumbled with trembling fingers for cartridges and tried

vainly to load up. Meanwhile, Little Jug Trilles rushed to the front door, followed by two of his men. This put them out of range of Mrs. Larkey, who was afraid to lean out of the window and aim at them. The three raiders used the butts of their guns on the door and smashed the paneling. At this moment three clean flashes shot out from the shake-barn fifty paces away. Three reports banged out as fast as a man can count.

Jug Trilles reeled back, clutching at his arm; one of his companions fell forward from the porch and lay face downward on the ground. The third turned to flee, but sank to his knees and then fell to his side. The rest of the attackers realized that they were being fired upon from behind, and fled precipitously toward the gate.

Quade saw them running pell-mell out to the plain, and then scurrying into the bear-brush where they had left their horses. As nearly as he could make out, there were only six in this retreat. Three of the others he had stretched. The fourth and last was Juan Scaly, the Mexican, who had climbed into the window where Sue had been keeping watch.

Quade hopped out of the hay-rick of the barn where he was hiding, and ran across the yard to Sue's room. He vaulted over the sill of the window, and Juan, who had already climbed in and chased Sue to the other side of the room, turned, picked up a chair, and hurled it. It caught Quade on the arm, knocking the revolver from his hand. Juan quickly followed his advantage and drew. Sue caught his arm, so that the Mexican fired into the ceiling.

Quade's eyes dilated to the dark of the room, and the flash of the gun told him where Juan was. He rushed, clinching until Juan dropped his gun. The two men separated and swung furiously at each other, their blows glancing wild because of the dim light. One sledge-hammer blow caught the Mexican in the chest, smashing him against the table, which overturned. Juan picked up the broken chair and raised it, but a right hook caught him on the mouth just as he was about to hurl the chair at Quade's head. A left followed him under the jaw, and he fell crumpling.

Sue's scream had brought her father into the room. The rancher struck a match, and Juan could be seen doubled up, half against the wall, half on the floor.

"The fight's over," Larkey said. "Four of 'em are stretched. Guess this 'll show the county a thing or two!" He lit the oil lamp, and ordered Sue to light up the rest of the house. "See to the old man and Chick," he said.

Lady Larkey came in and threw a pitcher of water on the dazed Mexican. Meanwhile Jim picked up his own six-gun and appropriated the Mexican's. When Juan came to he stared blankly at the faces above him, then scrambled awkwardly to his feet. Then he saw Jim, and his hand snapped to his empty holster. Realizing that he had been broken, he grinned sheepishly, his teeth seeming the main part of him.

"You're at liberty to drift," Larkey said. "And keep on driftin' till you're past the corral down by the stream bed—else you'll get some lead from your own gun spittin' into your liver."

"I'll go, *señor*. I'm a peaceful man, and I am your slave."

The rancher and Jim Quade hurried to the yard, where they picked up the three men who had been hit. Jug Trilles, whose wound was merely a slight crease in the arm, jumped up, but obeyed Quade's order to surrender his gun.

"The disagreement is over, mister," Trilles said. "I'll take my men off." The old outlaw sank to his knees. "Give me a swig."

"Come in here and let's have a look at you," Quade ordered.

Jug followed submissive to Quade's loaded hand. The latter on the way to the veranda picked up another wounded man—a rustler called Cow McGinnis.

A moment later Larkey entered the room, carrying one of the men over his shoulder. "This guy's going to kick off," he said. "Tend to him first."

Mrs. Larkey brought water and towels as the man was laid upon the sofa.

"It's China Pell," the rancher said. "He's a bad one—half Chink. Hold his head up."

The cattle-rustler looked around at the faces of the women, Larkey, Quade, and his two wounded companions.

"I'm one of Smoo Taurog's men!" China Pell whispered hoarsely.

"Shut up!" Trilles ordered. "We ain't among friends here."

Pell disregarded his master. "Smoo Taurog sticks by his men," he said. "I'll tell you that. If I croak to-night they ain't nothin' you ever dreamed about that's worse than what Taurog 'll do to you!"

"Shut up and let 'em fix your wounds!" Trilles ordered.

Mrs. Larkey held the gin to his lips, and her husband cut open the buckskin shirt.

"Taurog 'll wipe this score out, take it from me!" the rider whispered through his clenched teeth. "I feel like as if I'm goin', but I'm satisfied. When you set in on one of Taurog's games you pay ten to one. Taurog 'll meet you. He'll make you pay ten to one!"

Every one in the room was silent, so that the name of Taurog, although hissed almost inaudibly, stung clearly into Quade's ears.

"I want to meet Taurog," he said quietly. "Where is he?"

China Pell's peppered jaw tightened to a smile. "Who are you?"

"Jim Quade's my name—I'm looking for your chief."

"Go to him!" China Pell whispered. "He'll settle our account."

"Where is he?"

Pell struggled in the embrace of Mrs. Larkey and pointed out the window toward the south. He was glad the fight was not ended. He tried to mumble the words: "Lava—or else—" But he could say no more.

CHAPTER X.

HOW SMOO TAUROG GOT THE RETURNS.

IN the center of Taurog's domain was a little town which had sprung up in the desert several decades before because of a gold boom. There was no other cause for its existence. When the vein ran out, this mushroom town, like countless other desert towns of the country, was completely

surrendered to the sand dunes and the coyotes. Its shacks were left because of the prohibitive expense of transportation. Its signs still evoked memories of the old gambling hells and dance halls. "The Last Chance Saloon," "Hell's Hinges," and "The Paradise Red-Eye Parlor" were names which the sun and wind and sand had not quite effaced.

Approximately a quarter of a century after the last inhabitant had left Lava, the town suddenly underwent a miraculous though sinister "resurrection." Near by, toward the Rio Grande, was the stock-shipping station called Mule City, where Jim Quade had arrived from the East. This town still flourished, and for years it festered with the gathering of all the worst elements of the cattle country. Gamblers, thieves, card-sharps, gun-molls, street-walkers, and saloon men came to prey on the cattle people.

Cow-punchers, after their season of abstinence and long driving on the ranges, came here, roaring with their wealth. But Mule City had a municipal revolution. It lay down certain very stringent laws concerning gambling, drinking, and gun-fighting. It also threw out its bad element, bag and baggage. This bad element did not scatter, as the reformers had hoped. It stuck together and emigrated en masse to the deserted town of Lava.

To the west of Mule City was Smoo Taurog's country, and Smoo Taurog was beginning to be acclaimed as the unchallenged boss, the maker and breaker of sheriffs, the protector of ranchers who did his bidding, and the destroyer of sheepmen. The old deserted town of Lava stood in the heart of his territory, its shacks going to waste, overrun by gophers and centipedes and rattlers. The element which had been cast out of Mule City—the saloon men, card-sharps, and thieves thriving at the edge of civilization—came to Lava in an enthusiastic body. They resuscitated the faro banks and the saloons; they established themselves in the rooming-houses and the ghostly old dance-halls.

Lava was not incorporated, and it was not put on the map. It might have been considered a suburb of Mule City if it had

not been thirty miles away. Some people referred to it as Jackass City, because it was in reality only a small portion of Mule City. Others referred to it as Little Hell, because there was no good element in Lava. There was no school or church or prison or court-house. There was no sheriff or mayor or judge. True, the sheriff of the county spent a lot of his time in Lava—but he was there merely as a personal guest of the leading citizen, Smoo Taurog.

On the main street of Lava was a huge, garishly painted and brilliantly lighted shack called the Dead Cow Saloon. To enter this den it was necessary to pass through a long buffet which opened upon a dance-hall. Booths, like boxes at a theater, surrounded the hall and were raised about three feet above the level of the dance-floor. On the edge of the floor were placed the drinking tables and chairs, and in the recesses of the four corners were the gaming-tables.

On the night of the raiding of the Tumbling L and the defeat of Smoo Taurog's men the Dead Cow Saloon was crowded. Its proprietor was one of Taurog's henchmen, and his gaming palace, bar, and dance-hall served as the headquarters of Taurog when the latter visited his "capital." A good slice of Lava's population congregated at the dance-hall when they heard that a punitive expedition had been sent against the Tumbling L Ranch.

Smoo Taurog himself, according to his plan, had returned to the Dead Cow Saloon to establish an alibi for himself. Inasmuch as he had decreed that his raid should completely demolish the Tumbling L and all its inhabitants, including women and children, he considered it of prime importance to publish his absence and thus show himself to the populace of Lava that afternoon and evening.

Taurog even ordered a big dinner, inviting the proprietor of the Dead Cow Saloon, a favorite bartender, a croupier from the gambling-rooms, and four of the cabaret girls. It was a private affair, and the guests were very intimately acquainted with Smoo Taurog's methods. He even went so far as to announce to them that

the real purpose of the dinner was to celebrate the downfall of the Tumbling L outfit. A cattleman on the outskirts of the Taurog domain who had been so rash as to offer to fight was chastised, Taurog explained. His name was Ross Larkey—and his name would be remembered. His mark was the Tumbling L—an L leaning backward—and there would be lots of drags with the brand scattered about the country looking for "hospitable" ranchers.

"They'll talk of Ross Larkey in the days to come as the bird who wasn't afraid of Smoo Taurog!" the big boss proclaimed. "Maybe some of the Mule City reformers will raise a tombstone for him as a fallen hero."

The guests laughed, and one of them, the croupier, asked: "When 'll the chastisement be finished?"

"We ought to be hearin' the returns pretty soon. I left the gang in charge of little Jug Trilles, tellin' him to report to me here at Lava when he was through with what was to be performed. Jug Trilles will do the thing up right, I'll tell you. They ain't no flies on that little ole renegado!"

"Old Jug stops at nothin'—women nor children not excepted!"

"Speakin' of women," Taurog rejoined complacently as a barkeep brought in cigars and coffee and cigarets—"speakin' of women, I'll say this. They's women at the Tumblin' L. And I was give to understand they stuck by their poor ole fool of a rancher. Now I sent a certain Mexican gentleman by the name of Juan Scaly—knowin' that he has a perticular fondness for lady folk. They's no tellin' what 'll happen when Juan Scaly gets a few slugs of jackass brandy into his carcass!"

The crowd roared its appreciation of Taurog's method, and the celebration was growing to a hilarious climax when the barkeep stuck his head in the door to make an announcement that cast a particularly wet blanket over the spirit of the crowd.

Juan Scaly, the Mexican, was at that moment outside, having fled from the fight at the Tumbling L. The barkeep added that Juan gave evidence of having been most brutally attacked.

"His face was so busted up," said the

barkeep, "that I had to ax him who he was—me that's knowed him for five years!"

The Mexican was ushered into the little "banquet-room." Yes, the barkeep was right. Juan Scaly's high cheek-bones were cut and bleeding, his eyes swollen—one like a pulpy boiled beet with a slit for an eye. His lips, too, were puffed and split.

"What's the matter, Scaly? Did you meet up with a puma?"

"Damn right!" Juan admitted. "A gringo shows up to the Tumbling L just before we fight. I climb into the rancho and find myself in the dark with wan wild animal. Fists clawin' at me from out the dark. But I git him for it. Don't worry about that! I, Juan Scaly, will settle with him!"

"Looks as if you'd have to do somethin' to him besides fist fightin'!" the croupier laughed.

"Shut up!" Taurog snarled. He took the defeat of Juan Scaly as an insult of a personal sort. Scaly was his man—and whoever beat him up would have to pay. "Tell us about it, Scaly. You got caught in the dark—well, that don't mean a guy can fight—if he pots outen the dark."

"There's no more to tell, *señor*," Juan Scaly replied sulkily. "Jug Trilles makes very big mistake, that's all! Trilles thinks only one man was at the rancho what could shoot. He sees another greaser riding into the rancho. So Jug waits till evening and orders me to ride around to the mesa and then climb down the cliffs that hang near the west side of the rancho. I did this, *señor*, while many guns are being fired and death is everywhere in the air. I got into the room—for Juan Scaly is afraid of nothing. I got inside, *señor*—"

"And you got something else!" the croupier said, and the guests laughed.

"You got in, and this stranger you speak of beat you up?"

"He makes very big fight—I fall—the light is shining and I see him. The gringo is tall and with big fists—he is tall like you, *señor*. And he has wan look in his eye like the look of *el diablo*—clear and sharp he look at me and then he broke me and make me to vamoze!"

"He broke you! You let him break you!" Taurog said disgustedly.

"Señor, I was damn glad to get out of that room—with that eye tellin' me to vamoze. When I get into the yard the shoot was all over—no man anywhere. I spik what is the truth, señor. I hop on my cayuse and ride like hell."

"Jug Trilles probably got his men together for another attack," Taurog said assuredly. "He goes at this raidin' stuff careful like. But he sure does finish it."

"I'm thinking Jug Trilles he ran away, too, señor," the Mexican whined.

"Jug never runs away," Taurog shouted. "You mean to tell me he'd leave a fight where they was only two men ag'in' him? He's probably burned the ranch down by now. That bugaboo stranger of yours is probably out on his back in the mesquite with the coyotes stickin' around waitin' for him to get ripe."

Juan Scaly was unceremoniously kicked out of the room, and Taurog ordered wine for the guests.

"We ought to be hearin' about the finish of the fight any minute now," he said as they all filled their glasses. "Ten of my men ag'in' two— Hell! It's a joke! The Tumbling L will be sung about in songs, and the Indians will paint it on their pottery like as if it was a massacre! Ten of my men ag'in' two poor tenderfoot ranchers!"

The whole company joined in laughing at the "joke."

"Here's to the end of the Tumbling L!" the proprietor said, lifting up his glass.

"They ain't no more ranches goin' to buck me. They ought to learn by now that it don't pay. If one ranch bucked me and got away with it—all right, then the others can say 'Look at Smoo Taurog tryin' to bluff us! We'll fight him!' But no ranch has got away with it yet."

Before the glasses had been drained to Taurog's little speech the barkeep entered again. And again his long face and excited lips intimated that it was a vain toast the guests were drinking. A rider had returned from the Tumbling L Ranch and wanted to see Taurog. According to the barkeep, the man was badly wounded.

Taurog, trailed by his guests, left the table for the buffet where the wounded

rider was lying. He had been carried from his lathery horse and placed upon the floor, his back leaning partly against a chair. When Taurog saw the chunky little renegade—one of his best gunmen—he greeted him with the words:

"Now what the hell!"

Cow McGinnis lifted his square-jawed, ashen face.

"Chief, we got whipped. I may as well tell it to you straight from the shoulder." The man reached up to clutch at Smoo Taurog's knees. "Don't blame us, chief. It weren't our fault. They was bullets whizzin' outen the dark from every direction. I'm beggin' you, chief—don't blame us, pectect us. That's what I'm beggin' you. Pectect us!"

"Give him another swig," the proprietor put in. "He's gettin' whiter."

Smoo Taurog was not quite so compassionate. He kicked himself free and sneered: "You're crazy, Cow! Buck up. You're losin' your nerve just because you had a gun thrown on your laigs. You got a streak of yellow in you, or you wouldn't be whinin' about two men shootin' when you had ten men on your side!"

By this time there was a big circle around the wounded man—composed of dance girls, saloon men, and gamblers, as well as the cow-punchers and Indians from outside. The barkeep held some whisky to Cow's gray lips.

"How was the fight goin' on when you—when you left?" Taurog asked with a significant emphasis.

"I can't tell, chief. Somebody potted me outen the dark, and I woke up in the ranch-house with some women folk bandaging me up and throwin' water on me. When I said I was feelin' spry enough to ride I was give a few more drinks, put on a horse, and told to git."

"Who potted you?"

"I don't know for sure, chief. But I'm thinkin' it was a young guy I saw in the room—a tall guy with big shoulders and a square chin. Whether it was him or not, chief, all I can say is, look out for him. That's all I ask—just look out for him! Before I left I heard him sayin' somethin' about comin' after Taurog."

Taurog twirled his big cigar around in his mouth and then smiled. "This gent says he's comin' for Taurog, eh?" He finally burst out in a loud guffaw in which he was joined by every one in the buffet.

"That's all right—laff! But I'm afeared that guy's goin' to come searchin' for you to-night! And I want to be tucked into bed right quick afore he gets here. And look here, Stew," the white-faced man said as he turned to the barkeep, "you know that bit of sheet iron you hide behind when there's gun-shootin' goin' on in the dance-hall? Well, that's the kind of sheet I'd like for you to tuck me to bed with."

"Take him home to the crater in a buckboard," Taurog said. "Fix up his sore leg and sing him to sleep. He's goin' to be cryin' with bad dreams if he don't stop worryin'."

"This looks kind of bad, chief," the proprietor of the saloon said, after the wounded man had been packed away.

"How do you mean it looks bad?" Taurog flared up. "I'll swear here and now before every one that I'll handle any man that comes after me—with my bare fists. As for the raid, like as not others are burnin' the ranch down now. I'm goin' to get a posse and see for myself."

"What I mean, chief, is this," the proprietor said apologetically. "Havin' two men put out of the fight thisaway is bad for your rep. In days past whenever any one bucked you, all you did was to send a expedition and wipe 'em off the slate. That's why you've got such a name. No one dast oppose you because you always win. Did you ever stop to think what 'd happen if you ever lost?"

"What the hell 're you feedin' me? Are you losin' your nerve like this poor yellow Cow McGinnis?" Taurog turned his back on the proprietor and stalked toward the entrance of the buffet. "It's high time I change my original plan—which was to lay low while the raid was carryin' on!—Now," he concluded, "I must do some personal investigatin'."

He called the entire assembly of men and women together in the buffet, and declared he wanted to make a public announcement.

"Folks," he said, "you-all bein' particular friends of mine, I'm stakin' everything on your opinion. Now I'm give to understand that that's a certain gent out gunnin' for me personal—and I want everybody here and now to understand the facts of the case. What his grievance is I don't know, but I'm tellin' you-all here and now that I'm out for to get this guy afore he gets me—"

"Get 'im with your fists, chief!" one of the crowd cried. Others followed suit in their adulation: "You can meet any man with your fists, chief!" "Ain't no call for your ever bein' sat on by a jury for gun-shootin'! Not when you have them fists!"

"I ain't sayin' right now how I'll get this man," Taurog shouted out. "Mule City's on our trail for our gun-play, and I promise here and now that if he don't shoot first—I'll use my fists!"

The crowd cheered vociferously. When Taurog promised using his fists it meant an epic fight.

"Further and more," Taurog brayed, "I'm goin' to take horse and ride over to the Tumblin' L Ranch right now and settle this business before the night's out."

As he elbowed his way through his cheering subjects, and reached the door, five riders galloped down the main street of Lava. The saloons and dance-halls the entire length of the town disgorged their men and girls as the posse clattered past. The riders wheeled about in front of the Dead Cow Saloon, dismounted from their steaming horses, and crowded up to Smoo Taurog, who stood, feet apart, thwacking his boots with his crop.

The leader of the crowd was little Jug Trilles.

"It's all over, chief!" he said. "The damn Tumbling L outfit spit lead at us from every window and every shack. We give it up!"

Taurog looked around the group with a rapid searching glance, checking off each man he had sent on the expedition.

"Where's China Pell at?" he shouted. "At least he stayed to fight like I directed—at least he didn't join you rotten cowards!"

"Listen, chief!" Trilles explained while

the crowd surged in around the group of horses and men. "I was hit—"

"They got you, too!" Taurog bellowed furiously. "You damned, clumsy, slab-sided wart!"

Taurog paused, seeing Trilles's expression.

"Say, where is China Pell, anyhow? China Pell was the best fighter of the whole gang of you! Where's he at?"

None of the riders was disposed to answer this question. They looked at each other with sidelong troubled glances, then Trilles blurted out:

"Chief, I got to tell you what I saw. I was took in the house—and my wound dressed. China Pell was like you say—a damn good fighter. He was one of the three of us what rushed the front door of the ranch and—a damn good man he was, chief. The best among us, savin' you—"

"Well, out with it! What the hell do you mean by this here stammerin'? Where is China Pell?"

"He got hit, too, chief. He's daid."

The entire gang was frozen with silence at this news, and every face was turned to the chief. Smoo Taurog would avenge this, if he ever avenged a death in his life.

The giant figure straightened up so that he seemed to overtop the whole mob. He walked forward to the snubbing-post where his horse was hitched, and a wide lane opened automatically in the crowd.

"I'm warnin' you, chief," Trilles cried, "about that there hell-bender—the stranger—"

Taurog, seemingly without paying any attention to the last speaker, unhitched his horse and tightened the cinch.

"The stranger is comin' here, chief. The stranger is comin' here after you."

"That's what I'm given to understand," Taurog said without a change of expression on his grim mouth.

"His name is Jim Quade—says you killed his brother."

"If he's comin' here to Lava," Taurog rejoined, "I'll meet him half-way—out there on the desert road. And I'll ax him about China Pell. I'll ax him to— What did you say his name was?"

"Jim—brother of Sterry Quade."

"Sterry Quade?"

"Remember the old Quade Ranch? Big Bess Quade? Peter Belge, foreman—"

"Sterry Quade— This is his brother? Yes, I—I—"

Taurog did not finish. He gave the cinch strap a final pull as his horse took in wind. In another moment he had stepped deliberately up to his saddle, gathered his horse, wheeled about, and started on a fast trot down the main street, then northward to the desert and the road which led to the Tumbling L.

CHAPTER XI.

KIRBIE.

TAUROG struck out for the huge alluvial plain which lay between Lava and the Tumbling L. He could see the road stretching across the almost boundless expanse of sage. After a mile of sand and an almost obliterated trail through dunes dotted with sage, barrel cactus and yucca, the horseman found himself in the long final stretch of road. The pungent smell of the brush still clung to the earth, even though the night air was thin—so thin that the sky seemed ablaze with stars.

On that interminable road, Smoo Taurog judged, he could meet the stranger from the Tumbling L. But he had no intention of meeting him. Despite his boast delivered to the crowd in front of the Dead Cow Saloon, he had formulated a very different plan. To meet this stranger out on the middle of that sage-plain in the dead of night, and pick a fight with him, was a very foolhardy thing to do. In the first place, he had no idea what his adversary looked like. This would prevent Taurog's hiding in the sage and potting at him as he rode past. He might kill ten men before getting the right one—a hard thing to explain to Mule City juries.

Furthermore, his imaginative picture of the stranger did not invite him to hasten conclusions. What details Taurog had of his enemy's appearance he had obtained from the hysterical depictions of wounded men, with the result that this man gunning for him assumed an aspect of the most

alarming ferocity. Taurog decided to play a much surer game.

When he was completely out of sight of the town he struck westward for the trail which led up into the crater where he had built his house and home. An hour's heavy riding brought him to a long-falling cañon, at one end of which was a granite gateway or gorge. The ride grew constantly more difficult as the gorge was approached. It was five miles over a rocky trail, between overhanging hills that steepened and came closer together. Despite the great canopy of stars part of the path as it neared the western gateway was almost pitch dark. The gorge opened into a steep-walled, circular gulch, which was the crater of an extinct volcano, and on its huge flat bottom there was a small cone, riddled with caves and surmounted by a pueblo-like house—Taurog's nest.

The first thing that met the eye once the gorge was passed was this fortresslike pile of rock in the center of the crater-bed. A narrow, steep path wound around the base of this cone and approached the house by a long series of steps.

The interior of Taurog's castle was vault-like; comfortable now because cool and drafty. A huge fireplace, blackened but empty, with flagstones for a hearth, stretched the entire width of the main room. Candles softened the harsh stone walls. Chunky oak furniture, stoneware bowls, Indian baskets and pottery enlivened an otherwise sinister scene. On the floor were puma skins—a dozen of them—which maintained the dull, barbaric monotone. The only touches of color were the red and yellow Hopi blankets.

A large woman—half-breed white and Mexican—took Taurog's sombrero, saw the troubled look in his eyes and checked herself in the act of greeting him. She gave evidence of having once been handsome, but now her dark eyes were pouchy, her mouth drooped and painted.

"Don't bother me to-night, Nell," Taurog said as he took off his spurs and threw them on the floor. "I want to see Kirbie—and you keep out!"

Nell Gamble had long since fallen from her exalted position in the heart of Tau-

rog to a disgruntled and rather slovenly "housekeeper." She mumbled at him.

"Nowadays you come home and treat me like a servant. What am I in this house, anyway?"

"You're my sweetheart," Taurog rejoined. "So get the hell out of here and find Kirbie."

He threw himself into a chair, lit a big cigar, and puffed thick, bluish clouds into the dim ceiling. A tremendous yellow dog, which might have been Dane and wolf, stuck its ugly head over the arm of Taurog's chair. It was a hideous beast, and the chain clanking from its neck gave evidence of the power in its sleek shoulders and glistening fangs.

Into this scene stepped Taurog's foster-daughter, Kirbie—a telling contrast to the woman who had just gone out. She was a slim, graceful figure, with hair done up by her Hopi servant in a manner that was strangely beautiful. A large jade comb flashed out with the same dancing reflection of candlelight which could be seen in her eyes. They were not black eyes, although their slanting lids gave that impression. They were rather of a gray, which, in the candlelight, approached green. Her arms were slender, of a soft olive, vivid in contrast to a black silk mantilla and the red calico dress.

This picture pleased Taurog. He surveyed the girl with an indulgent smile, while two long puffs of smoke came slowly from his nostrils. His smile was indulgent, not because of any love he might have for her. He was thinking of his plan to get Jim Quade. This girl was an important part of his plan.

"I thought I'd ride ahead and have a little visit with you before you turned in," Taurog said.

Kirbie paused before running to Taurog to kiss him. There was a curious look upon his face—something she had never seen before. She knew that this man was not her real father, and for that reason she was sometimes intuitively afraid. Instead of kissing him she took the bandanna which he wore about his huge red neck and wiped away the dust and sweat of his forehead. Taurog drew her to him so as to put her on

his knee, but he felt that this fatherly intimacy would make it harder for him to say what he wanted to say. Instead he told her to sit down while he got up and paced the room.

"Why are you so worried?" the girl finally asked.

"I ain't worried—except there's been a fight."

"And you were in it, father?" Kirbie said apprehensively.

"Yes, but it's all over, so don't get scairt. It was up to the Tumbling L—old Ross Larkey—I wish him and his folks and his whole ranch was burnt up!"

"If you wish that it must be that they've wronged you. You have never fought any fight except fights that are just—that's what I've always heard about you."

"I'm glad you understand it thataway, gal. They was a just cause here—as always. Ross Larkey said he'd pot any of our men that set foot on his ranch. He got into a argyment with Jug Trilles, who was ridin' up that way with nine of my men. Jug naturally tears in for a fight. Well, they was a stranger turned up who helped Ross Larkey fight my men. Our men was licked—and for the first time in the history of this here range."

"If you had been there, father, they wouldn't have been licked," the girl cried.

"You kind of like the way I fight my fights—aye?"

"Every one says that there is no man so great and strong and invincible as you!" Kirbie went on.

"And what else do they say?" Taurog asked cajolingly.

"They say that all men are afraid of you—that there is no man who is brave enough to stand up and tell you to your face that he will fight you!"

"And—"

"And that you never need to use your six-gun. They are afraid of your fists. Your fists alone can rule this range! When I marry a man he must be like you—tall and invincible and a fighter—"

"You're pretty proud of me then, and you think I been about as good as a real dad in the years past—sendin' you to school to Dallas and all that stuff?"

"Why, of course."

"And you love me?"

"I said I loved you. You've never doubted that. I love and honor you as if you were a real father. I would do anything in the world for you! That is how much I love you!"

"And if some one come along and stretched me what would you do?"

"I'd kill him!" the girl said, her eyes flashing in the candlelight.

"Now that's talkin'!" Taurog laughed. "There's the Spanish blood a-talkin' in you now. Your ma used to talk thataway. Black-eyed *señora* that she was! You was too young to remember her. But damme she'd say that! She'd pick up a feud and fight it to the end—worse'n any man!"

"But how absurd to talk of that," the girl laughed. "There is no man who would dare to fight you! They are all afraid."

"Up till now they ain't been a man livin' who would stand up to me and say, 'Taurog, I ain't afeared of your eye nor your hand! I'm goin' to fight you!'"

"What do you mean by saying 'up till now'?"

"The stranger what beat off ten of my men up to the Tumbling L—he's gumin' for me."

"For you!" Kirbie gasped.

"He's got some grudge—ten years cold. But he's heatin' it up and swearin' he'll pot me on sight. Says I killed his brother. Like as not his brother was some brand-blotter—or outlaw!"

"If I ever meet him, father, I'll pay him for so much as threatening you."

"There, there, now, gal! You ain't the one to be talkin' of killin'."

"But he's a man who dared say he will fight you—you, Smoo Taurog, when no man has ever dared before!" the girl cried passionately. "It simply can't be! He must be afraid of you. He *will* be afraid—as all the others. I'll make him afraid myself!"

"I ain't goin' to let you soil your hands doin' any gun-shootin'," Taurog said. "They's grease-fat on them guns that gets in your nails. Look at these here hands of mine—and look at yourn. No, lady. You ain't goin' to ever kill nobody!"

"Where is this man—and what's his name?" Kirbie asked.

"If you love me," Smoo Taurog said, "I'm goin' to let you do me a good turn—no shootin' or anything like that. But you can help me wipe this here score out. The man's name is Jim Quade. He's probably down to Lava right now, huntin' for some more fight. Now, this is what you can do. It ain't much, but it 'll repay me for what I've done for you the past years—brigin' you up like as if you was my own gal."

"What shall I do, father?"

"Go down to Lava to-night. Search out this hell-bender, Quade, and usin' any methods you wish to employ—entice this here bird up into the crater. When he gets here we'll treat him like he deserves."

"Why can't I just have him brought here in handcuffs?"

"No, no!" Taurog objected. "If I had a man abducted like that it would be hard for me to explain. Mule City is watchin' for such things—it's too much like out-laws and Mexican renegados. There'd be a lynching party and we'd all be wearin' rawhide neckties. But if you get this bird interested in you and follerin' you up here—then nobody can say nothin'. I can announce that he was chasin' you and didn't act gentlemanlike when you told him to go home."

"I'll bring him here, father," the girl said resolutely.

"But, remember, no shooting: I'd hang for it!"

"You'd hang!"

"He's got to be brought alive. Even if somebody in Lava potted him in a fight at cards they'd say at Mule City I framed it. They're perticular eager to get the goods on me. Any stranger killed in Lava is blamed on me. It's here to the crater you got to bring this bird and then I'll attend to him."

"You'll attend to him—with your fists?" the girl asked, proudly fondling Taurog's tremendous hand.

"Maybe. I ain't promising. But I'll get him."

The girl and her foster-father went down to the stables where Kirbie's horse, the Shooting Star, was being saddled. As they

stepped out onto the winding path which led down from the house, they heard a buck-wagon clattering up from the gorge road.

"It's Cow McGinnis," Taurog explained. "I had him sent up here from Lava."

The girl seemed not to have heard Taurog's statement. "I was thinking," she said as they waited for the buckboard to drive up "what if this man, Jim Quade, is not the gunman you think he is? How about justice?"

"They ain't no 'ifs' about Jim Quade. He's a killer."

"But you are only going on the word of other men," the girl objected. "If it is your own word I would not doubt. But—"

"Wait," Taurog said. "You can see for yourself."

The buck-wagon was driven up by one of Taurog's half-breeds, Pedro. Lying in a pile of blankets was Cow McGinnis, his face drawn and gray.

Kirbie drew back shocked, and then called to her Hopi servant to bring water.

"We'll 'tend to Cow," Taurog said. "I'll get Nell Gamble to bandage him up agin and get him a little supper."

"I'm feelin' better, chief," Cow McGinnis said. "Now that I'm in the crater I'm feelin' all right, because I'm feelin' safe."

"Tell this here gal who hit you," Taurog said.

"Who hit me? It was a bird by the name of Jim Quade, gal, and he's after our chief! I'm advisin' you, chief. Don't leave the crater to-night."

"The gal's goin' after him," Taurog said quietly.

Cow let out a long, low whistle as he was being carried out of the buck-wagon. "If the gal pots him, chief," he said, "it will be plain that it was you as sent her. And I'm thinkin' you'll have to go easy on gun-shootin' for a while. Mule City's goin' to be on your trail after that thar raid to-night at the Tumbling L."

"She ain't goin' to shoot him," said Taurog. "She's goin' to bring him here."

Cow McGinnis stared out of his bloodless eyes. "If she's goin' to play that sort of a game—entecin' him and all that—ain't you a bit afeered of her own safety, chief?"

"She can take care of herself," Taurog grumbled. "Better go up and get dressed, gal. Shootin' Star's ready."

"Give me your six-gun, father, and I promise you Quade won't give me any trouble."

Taurog took out his revolver and handed it over to the girl. Both the wounded man and his master watched how Kirbie took the black, long-barreled .44 and spun the cylinder with her slender, tapering fingers. There was a deliberate coolness about those fingers which made Cow McGinnis and Taurog turn to each other with a knowing smile.

Taurog whistled to the half-breed who had driven the wagon.

"Bring on Shootin' Star, Pedro. The lady will be ridin' to town."

CHAPTER XII.

QUADE COMES TO THE "DEAD COW."

THE normal activities of the "Dead Cow Saloon" were suspended that night when it was understood that Quade was on his way to Lava hunting for Smoo Taurog. The fact that Taurog had ostensibly left Lava to meet Quade on the road did not lessen the suspense of waiting. The proprietor ordered another drink on the house for everybody present, but the effects of this wore off with surprising rapidity. Quiet again descended and was uninterrupted except for groups of people talking in low, ominous voices. A murder, they felt, was about to be committed out on the old sand-strewn county road. Or, in the event that Taurog and Quade missed, Quade would enter the town, and no man could conjecture what would happen.

The proprietor ordered his negro band to strike up its music and the dancing was started again. The croupiers dealt cards as the games were resumed, and as much hilarity as possible was encouraged. But the proprietor knew that there was a mock note in the carnival spirit which had always been rampant in his place. Although the jazz band was louder than ever, there was a certain ominous undertone to it. And at short interludes between dance-

pieces the crowd fell to an abrupt and nerve-racking silence. The men at the gaming-tables looked around expectantly; the girls took their partners to places conveniently near exits; and the entrance to the dance-hall—the long, dim saloon which generally needed a bouncer to keep it from being jammed—was not automatically clear.

Toward twelve o'clock the wind began as usual to sweep into the door and cover the dance-floor with sand. This was not objectionable to the dancers. If anything, it improved the rough-hewn boards for purposes of that old pounding, noisy dance known as the Texas Tommy. Every minute the hall itself became more crowded, for people from the faro-house across the street, and the saloons on every corner, came in to ask about the fight. The place grew hot as well as dusty, and the Chinese lanterns turned dim in the thickening clouds of tobacco-smoke.

At one o'clock a hush fell upon the assembly of gamblers, girls and cow-men. The buffet door, the floor around which was completely clear for a radius of ten feet, was opened and a man walked in. He was tall, athletic, with holster and cartridge-belt about his cord trousers; a baggy shirt and a lop-brimmed "campaign" hat. He stepped to the bar, tossed off a drink, and then walked into the dance-hall. For a moment he looked around at the gaping mob, and unconcernedly took a seat at a table in one of the booths.

At the door of the proprietor's office in a corner of the dance-hall stood Jug Trilles and Juan Scaly, hiding behind the protection of a crowd of girls. Both men bore marks of their encounter with this newcomer. In fact, Jug Trilles's arm was in a sling, and the shoulder so completely bandaged he was forced to keep his head constantly to one side.

Jug Trilles was old and crafty, but Juan Scaly was young and eager for his revenge. Scaly begged a gambler for his revolver, but Trilles put his hand on the Mexican's arm.

"Not yet, Scaly," he said. "This is too sudden. You're goin' to blow in and mess things up like the way we messed them up at the Tumbling L. Wait and let's do this right so's no blame will be on our own

hides. Let's do it like Smoo Taurog would do it—not givin' the hell-bender a chanst."

Having been broken by Quade at the Tumbling L, Trilles was put to the humiliating necessity of borrowing a revolver from the proprietor. Then the latter, according to little Trilles's directions, posted a gunman at every exit of the place, including the saloon exit and all the windows.

"If that gent tries to get out you're at liberty to plug him!" Trilles explained. "Taurog and me will fix it up with the sheriff."

The negroes were ordered to bang away with their mandolins and cornets. And as soon as a normal atmosphere could be restored Trilles suggested that the proprietor accost the stranger with words of greeting.

But the atmosphere remained tense and ominous. The music was lame because the musicians wanted to see what was going to happen. They preferred to be the first to reach the exits in case of gun-shooting. And of course there was no dancing nor even pretense at dancing. The girls, with their partners, who were mostly brand-blotters and half-breeds, were eager to see how Jug Trilles and Juan Scaly would handle the stranger. Dancing, gambling, drinking, and squabbling stopped dead, as the proprietor, whose name was Jude Silent, approached the table where Jim Quade sat. Jude was a huge, beefy man with silver hair, double chin and wagging cigar.

"Evenin', stranger," he said, sliding his hands comfortably between his belt and his fat stomach. "I'd admire for to know you. I'm the owner of this here joint—the 'Dead Cow,' they call it."

Quade leaned forward, placing his arms on the wet, suddy table, looked at the newcomer with a smile, and remarked: "Maybe you'd like to know my name?"

"No, no, not by no means," the big man objected. "We never ax names in these parts. It's considered all-powerful impertinent. Why, damme, pard, if I should so much as ax you who you was, you know what I'd expect?"

"No; what?"

"Why, I'd expect you to draw on me and pot me! Like as if your business was hair-brandin'."

"I'm not a cattle-rustler," the visitor rejoined calmly. "And my name is Jim Quade. I used to live on this range ten years ago with my brother and my grandmother. My brother got killed by a bunch of the very sort of men you mention—the sort who cannot tell their names or their brands."

"Dam' if I don't remember something of that sort," the saloon-owner remarked, proffering a cigar. "Quade was the name of a young cattleman—a good gunman, too, as I remember—and a bird what everybody was afraid of good and plenty." He looked at Jim. "So you're his brother—eh?"

"Sterry Quade's brother," Jim said. "And I've since found out the man who killed him was Smoo Taurog, who seems to run this county."

"Yes, he runs this county—thar ain't no one who'll pick a quarrel with you for making that thar statement," Jude Silent affirmed solemnly. "Runs it with his fist, not his gat. Thar ain't a man ever showed up yet what 'll buck Smoo Taurog's rule except, as I understand, a rancher up toward Mule City—the Tumbling L. He bucked him—and a two-gun gentleman helped him out!"

"I was the man that helped him out," Quade said.

"Hell's fire! You don't mean to tell me—it was you that did the trick! Well, your fame's come before you, pard, so to speak, and I'm axing you to have a drink on the house."

"One other thing you may want to know," Jim said. "I was told that Smoo Taurog hangs out here whenever he comes to Lava. I've come to meet him to-night. I want to tell him he's the man that killed Sterry Quade."

Jude Silent had no direct repartee for this declaration. The words were too serious in their import to be turned off with banter. He thought for a moment; even frowning his fat, red brow.

"Yes, you're right," he finally said. "Smoo does hang out here. If you want to meet him—that's none of my business. You can meet him here if you have a mind to. He's liable to show up in a little while. What do you say to waiting—having a few

drinks on the house—and a gal for a nice sociable little dance?”

“I’d like a tomale,” Quade said. “I’m hungry.”

“Right-o,” Mr. Silent answered. “A good hot chicken tomale. I’ll see to it—and a bottle of wine to go with it.”

The proprietor left, and a buzz, partly of disappointment, went around the crowd of onlookers. The fight for which they had waited so expectantly seemed to have been completely sidetracked by the extraordinarily friendly conversation the two men indulged in. But when Jude Silent withdrew into his little office, taking with him Juan Scaly and old Jug Trilles, the crowd’s expectations were again raised. Furthermore, the fact that all windows and doors were guarded presaged exciting developments.

Jude Silent’s big, red face was moist with a nervous perspiration, his silvery hair rumpled from scratching, and his cigar chewed to a shapeless brush. He shut the door behind him as soon as he was alone with Scaly and Jug.

“He’ll stay for a while,” the proprietor said, mopping his face. “What do you birds say we do to him?”

“As I was tellin’ Juan Scaly here,” Jug Trilles began. “This here time we’re goin’ to get Quade right. He ain’t goin’ to have any chanst for a comeback.”

“Dope him,” the proprietor suggested, holding a match to his dead cigar.

“Hell, no. That’s too old. Every one would get it. Might there’s be a trial up to Mulé City and then where’d we be at? You can’t afford to have people doped in this here establishment unless it’s absolutely necessary. Now, this time it ain’t necessary.”

“Give me wan chanst, and I shoot him up outright,” Juan Scaly avowed, his Mexican desire for revenge overcoming him.

“Now, look here, Mexico,” Trilles said. “You’re goin’ to get your revenge—but what’s a revenge when you’re hangin’ daid from a sycamore limb? You want revenge so’s you can live and enjoy it the rest of your life, don’t you? Well, then, shut up and listen to me.” He put his arm around

both of the men and said quietly, “Now what I figured on is this: Me and one of your barkeeps will stay outside the door nearest the table where Jim Quade is sitting at. Then you, Jude, will go to him and get him into a talk and frisk him.”

“He’s too sharp. I couldn’t get his six-gun away without he’s drugged. Dope him, I tell you.”

“Now, look here, Jude, you do as I tell you. Pick his gun-pocket with them trick fingers of yours, and the barkeep will rush at him right off’n the bat. Then when Jim Quade ain’t armed no more—Juan Scaly here and a dozen men can lay to and wallop him. It ’ll look of course like Juan Scaly was the cause of it, bein’ as how Juan was licked up to the Tumbling L. Then every one will say: ‘Look at Juan Scaly and his gang beatin’ up Jim Quade,’ and I’ll hear the rumpus, and bein’ the sheriff’s made me one of his shotgun deputies, I’ll come in and say: ‘What’s all this rumpus?’ And I’ll say: ‘Cut it out! This is a peaceable place and I’m here to see that law and order’s done!’ But you birds—you won’t cut it out and you won’t do nothin’ I tell you. So I’ll say: ‘Quiet or I’ll start in with my six-gun!’ But that won’t do no good, either. You birds will still go on beatin’ up Quade and lettin’ him fight. Then I’ll out with my gat and plug away, bein’ careful of course to hit no one except Mr. Jim Quade.”

“That sounds a bit of all right,” the proprietor remarked dryly.

“Then if they’s any objections as to how come this stranger was killed we can all explain and the blame won’t fall on nobody and there won’t be no vigilance committee invitin’ us to look up some tree.”

“But, Señor Trilles, I beg for you to aim with care,” Juan Scaly put in. “I’m going to make a big fight with that gringo. And I desire, *señor*, that you do not stop the fight by putting lead in my back.”

“I guess you guys can trust my hand,” said old Jug Trilles.

“And also that there gat of mine,” the proprietor added.

“Aim straight, *señor*,” said the Mexican. “Kill him and I am forever your slave!”

(To be continued NEXT WEEK.)

Alice Awakens

by Howard Rockey



A DRAB little figure in a slouchy sports costume came half hesitatingly across the lawn and ascended the steps of the Country Club. She was thin and angular, and her primly arranged hair was drawn tightly about her forehead, accentuating the sharpness of her features. Her stride was awkward, and she dropped her eyes diffidently as she crossed the veranda and entered the house, never even glancing toward the merry little party of young folks gathered under the awning.

"It's a shame that Alice is so plain." Hallie Harmon leaned back languidly in a wicker chair, eagerly conscious of her own pulchritude.

"Plain!" exclaimed Pauline Thompson cattily. "She's as plain as the pudgy nose on her homely face!" And, consulting the mirror of her vanity-case, she proceeded to powder her own saucy one.

"She's a nice kid, though," defended Teddy Vandayne. "The trouble is she shuts up like a clam whenever a man comes around."

"They don't come around often, do they, Ted?" Hallie asked sneeringly. "If they do, I haven't noticed them."

Alice Blake, registering her score at the desk in the foyer hall, flushed deeply and the faintest trace of a tear came into her lackluster eyes. She had overheard the remarks, and they cut her like a knife.

"Somebody ought to tell her about her

clothes," put in Marie Drew. "Smart frocks cover a multitude of sad looks."

"Why don't you take her in hand, Marie?" suggested Hallie with an appraising scrutiny of the other's chic attire. Then she could not resist adding sarcastically, "You *know* you've the reputation of being the best dressed girl in town."

"I take her in hand?" shrugged Marie. "My dear, I've too many more important things to think of—besides, Alice is quite as well able to afford a fashionable Fifth Avenue modiste as I am. Mme. Therese, for instance, could do wonders with her. The trouble is she doesn't seem to care."

That cut was too much. Alice had been caring more and more for the past ten years—ever since she was a little miss of twelve. With half a sob she ran up-stairs to the women's quarters, and throwing down her golf-bag despondently, peered hopelessly into the mirror. It did not reflect anything she had not realized before. Since the age when little girls first begin to wonder whether they are pretty, Alice had known that *she* was not. She knew she was not even homely—that she was distinctly ugly.

The realization had hurt at her very first childhood parties. Mothers had given her pitying looks and then smiled fondly at their own bright-faced offspring. None of the boys ever cared to collect her forfeit when kissing games were played. It was not the fact that they did not wish to kiss

her that troubled Alice; she had always liked boys as companions, but she had never been sentimental, even in the most immature meaning of the word. But her heart had been heavy when she understood why none of the youthful swains ever thought to bring her lemonade or ice-cream and cakes; while little Hallie Harmon, with her fluffy-ruffles and her long, golden curls, had ruled her knickerbockered beaus as loftily as a lovely princess commands her fawning courtiers.

As she went through high school the consciousness of her unattractiveness grew keener and more dismaying. At fraternity dances, at church festivities, and at the youthful gatherings in various homes, she became aware that she was destined to be a wall-flower. Alice was always invited, of course. A Blake would naturally be asked to any social event in East Morton. But it was not long before she learned, to her distress, that her escorts were elected by lot. The names of the various girls were written on slips of paper, and the one who drew the chit with "Alice Blake" penciled on it regarded himself as unlucky, and was teased by his male companions.

She grew conscious of the fact that but for the elders of the little colony and the loyalty of more fortunate girls, who sympathized with her, she probably would have had no one at all to take her on such occasions. Her proud little soul had rebelled. She had declined several invitations, inventing flimsy excuses, but pressure at home and the pleadings of the other flappers had finally persuaded her to accept. As the boys grew older they became more courteous, and extended their invitations to Alice as though they really meant them; but she could not help observing that the same youth seldom accompanied her twice, while several of the other girls were beginning to be "rushed."

Perhaps it was just as Ted Vandayne had said. She "shut up like a clam." Alice was diffident, embarrassed in the presence of the opposite sex, and keenly conscious of her lack of pulchritude. She felt that the local youths escorted her from a sense of duty rather than because they wished to do so, with the result that she held herself

in cold reserve and proved a total failure at casual conversation.

Now she made her way down-stairs and out by the rear entrance of the club. She felt that she did not wish to encounter any one—least of all the carefree group of popular débutantes and young eligibles having tea on the porch. She wanted to be alone—to think, perhaps to cry just a little.

With a heavy heart she took the short cut to the hedge and slipped out upon the sidewalk that led to her home. She had lived there alone with a servant since the death of her mother, nearly two years before, and in all that time no young man had called, unaccompanied by some other girl. Mrs. Blake's death had proved a severe blow to Alice, for she had loved her mother deeply, and her father was but a hazy childhood recollection. The portrait in the living-room spoke all too plainly of the source of her lack of beauty; yet somehow the expression of the stern-faced man in the frame steeled Alice to new courage when she was feeling blue.

The passing of Mrs. Blake had brought a sense of grieved relief to Alice. Of a butterfly type herself, Mrs. Blake could not understand her daughter's seeming indifference to society in general and to young men in particular. Her resulting unpopularity had annoyed the matron, and she had done her best to force Alice into the matrimonial lists. She had overdressed her daughter in a vain effort to make her more attractive; but the result had been a dismal failure and had caused a deeper depression in the spirits of the girl. She had hated the lacy, frilly, gaudy things Mrs. Blake's taste had selected; which was, perhaps, the reason for Alice's present seeming lack of sympathy with dainty feminine apparel.

Half-way home she heard the roar of a racer, and glancing up, saw young Bobby Trueman putting on the brakes, and beckoning to her. "Say, Alice!" he called out cheerily. "I was just looking at your score on the book back at the club. That was bully! You'll win the women's cup if you're not careful!"

Alice flushed with pleasure. She might not be a graceful dancer, and no youth

relished sitting one out with her, but she *did* shine on the links, and she knew it. And even the faintest praise or suggestion of flattery was so rare a thing with her that she was delighted at Trueman's remark.

"Hop in and let me give you a lift," he suggested. "I'm going right past your house."

Right past! Of course it had to end that way. They always went right past—without thinking of stopping in. But it *was* kind of Bobby to invite her to ride with him, and because the subject was golf, she chatted brightly as the speedy machine shot along. It paused in front of the pretty little house that was now Alice's own—a house that she loved, because it always welcomed her, and because it was all she had, except the modest little fortune her mother had left her. Alice got out and thanked him. It did not occur to her to ask him to step in for tea, and Bobby evidently did not expect that she would.

"I'd like to play with you some day next week, if you've nothing better to do," he suggested, and Alice colored with surprise.

"Why, I'd like to very much," she answered, somewhat flustered.

"I'll call you up," he promised as he started the car, and the racer sprang off with a snort; but Alice felt that he would not—that he would promptly forget all about it; just as the other men did.

Indoors she entered the living-room and threw herself into an easy chair. There were no tears in her eyes, and cold, self-analysis had conquered the hurt in her heart. She looked up at her father's portrait, and it seemed to give her new inspiration—a fighting spirit that had marked Thomas Blake's briefly successful career.

She even found courage to laugh at the remarks that had lashed her ears at the club. She forgot for the moment how Hallie and Pauline and Marie had changed since their childhood days. Snobbishness on their part had replaced a former sort of sisterly loyalty and affection; when the trio occasionally called upon her, Alice was always conscious of a patronizing note in everything they said.

If some one had glimpsed her riding with

young Trueman she knew that Bobby would be twitted about it. If the fact ever reached Hallie's pink, shell-like ears, she would promptly proceed to add him to her string of devotees, just to demonstrate to Alice and the town the folly of trying to compete with her in winning masculine favor. And Hallie knew how to do it—with her pretty pout, her baby stare, and her fetching, flirtatious ways.

Alice's brow clouded and her little brown hands clenched. "It's your own fault, Alice Blake!" she scolded herself. "You've let them put you on the shelf just because you are not pretty. Your looks will never win you a prize at a beauty show—and while clothes might help a lot, they don't *make* the woman any more than they make a man!"

For a long time she sat there in silence, a new light coming into her eyes. Other homely women had made themselves attractive, had done worth while things, and caused the world to flock about them by sheer force of personality. Yes, she decided, personality was one of the things she had lacked—a quality she had carelessly, if not deliberately, neglected to cultivate. But she realized that she must achieve even more than personality to make herself stand out, to take her place as a rival against Hallie and Pauline and Marie.

It was not the thought of becoming popular with the men that prompted her, nor was it the desire to be revenged upon the girls for their change of heart and their recent slurring remarks. It was the awakening of the girl herself—the ambition to be admired that is latent in the heart of every woman.

"I'll do it!" she resolved firmly, then wondered just how to go about it.

She had read of the foreign actress who had billed herself as the "Ugliest Woman in the World." Alice smiled and thought that she might qualify as far as the title went, but she had no talent for acting, dancing or singing—and besides, the stage did not appeal to her. Always of a studious mind, she considered making some important profession her life work; but somehow the idea of becoming a bespectacled professor or a dignified, mannish-appearing

leader of feminine movements, failed to strike a sympathetic chord.

"I don't know yet just what course I'll adopt," she said to herself at last, "but before I try to conquer the world I'm going to conquer East Morton. Then, if I like, I can look for new fields of endeavor. In the mean time I'm going away from here—and I won't be back until the Ugly Duckling can make them all sit up and take notice!"

Then she slipped up-stairs to her own pretty room, and carefully locked the door. She threw open a closet and peeped smilingly into its depths. She took the chintz cover from a trunk in the corner, and raised its lid. From the shelf of another closet she lifted down a number of bandboxes, pulled off the lids, and left them scattered about the floor. There was a mischievous smile on her face as she did so, an illumination which gave it an intriguing quality that would have startled East Morton. Her brain was sharpening and her plan was beginning to formulate as she slipped down-stairs again to inform Jane, her housekeeper, that she was going away.

II.

ALICE had taken a taxi over to Carolsville, and there boarded the train for New York. So no one was aware of her departure until Hallie received a letter from her two mornings later. It was written on the stationery of the Hotel Martha Washington, and its contents made Hallie's baby blue eyes open wide.

A minute later she was at the telephone talking eagerly to Pauline. "Can you imagine whatever has come over her?" she was asking. "Just let me read you the letter!" And she read:

"DEAR HALLIE:

"I've been called away, and may be gone quite a little time. It was quite unexpected, and I simply did not have time to arrange matters as I should have liked at home.

"Jane is a good old soul and will look after things in my absence, but you know how stupid she is. There were some details I just could not entrust her with, and I wonder if you would mind attending to them for me?

"You'll find my room in frightful disorder.

I had to pack a few things and run. So, if you wouldn't mind going to the house and straightening up a little bit I'll be eternally grateful.

"Affectionately,

"ALICE.

"P. S.—I'll only be here overnight, so a letter wouldn't reach me. I'll send you my address later on. "A."

"She certainly has a nerve to ask *us* to clear up after her!" snapped Pauline over the phone.

"But I'm dying of curiosity to know where she's gone and why," was Hallie's answer. "Let's go down together—and take Marie along. Perhaps we can persuade old Jane to tell us all about it."

"Fair enough!" consented Pauline, and then the conversation drifted off into a seemingly endless discussion of frocks, fashions and flirtations, interspersed with gossip.

Shortly after luncheon a touring-car drove up before the Blake home, and three fluffy visions of loveliness alighted and made their way through the little garden. Old Jane answered their summons and said that Alice had explained to her about the letter. No, indeed, she didn't know exactly why Miss Alice had gone, or just when she was coming back. Disappointed, the three plied her eagerly with questions, but whether or not Jane really knew, that was her story—and she stuck to it.

So the three went up-stairs to explore the hastily deserted bedchamber, and there they discovered a revelation that rendered them speechless.

"Will you *look?*" exclaimed Pauline, staring into a half-open drawer, from which showered, as in a filmy waterfall, the laciest of lingerie and the sheerest of silken, embroidered hosiery.

Hallie stood spellbound before the closet, gazing at a costly array of dainty afternoon frocks and stunning evening gowns that made her own wardrobe look poverty-stricken. Marie, too, had a surprise. Each hat-box revealed a still more fetching creation from some well-known Fifth Avenue milliner—chapeaux, whose labels suggested extravagance forbidden to any of the three.

"And I said she didn't care for clothes!" Marie sank down upon the bed, thunder-struck. "Do you realize that these things

are comparatively new—that every one of them is right in the mode *now*? If she's left these behind, I'd like to see what she's taken with her!"

"But what on earth did she buy them for, since she never wore them?" puzzled Hallie. "She always looked like a frump! Gaze on these!" she went on in perplexity as she revealed an array of evening slippers of every color and description—walking pumps, sport shoes, boots of varied styles and leathers, all of the costliest makes.

"It's beyond me!" confessed Marie. "But I'd like to borrow this hat to wear to the dance on Thursday."

"And this gown!" seconded Pauline as she tenderly fondled a gorgeous thing of crepe and silver brocade.

Then the telephone rang and they heard Jane answer it. "'Deed, no, Mr. Trueman," she was saying, and the girls pricked up their ears. "Ah, can't say when Miss Alice will be back. She's done gone to New Yawk."

That capped the climax. What had Alice been putting over on them, and what were they to learn next?

III.

BUT the solution of the mystery was all very simple. Bobby Trueman was a fiend for golf. It was not that he had wished to play with Alice the girl, but with Alice the golfer; and he was genuinely disappointed to learn of her absence. Alice did not know about that; but she did know the answer to the other mystery.

The girls had imagined she did not care about clothes—that she either had no taste in dress, or else was too close-fisted to buy herself pretty things. But the truth was that she reveled in lovely lingerie and pretty frocks and shoes; and when her inheritance enabled her to make her own selection she had gone on many a shopping spree, visiting the most exclusive establishments in the city. However, the butterfly was not ready as yet to emerge from the chrysalis stage. In fact, if it had not been for Pauline's remark at the Country Club Alice might never have done so.

Ever since the frumpy frocks of her

mother's designing had been laid aside she had longed to appear in public in her new finery. But the old diffidence would not permit her to do so. She could not bring herself to face the charge of dolling herself up in "war-paint" and splendid "scenery" to counteract her homeliness. Yet, day after day, and night after night, when she was alone at home, she had slipped into these pretty things and had reveled in the soft luxury of their feel and the pleasing reflection of her mirror.

Self-consciousness had prevented her wearing these hidden treasures in public. The underlying cause of her fear was a childlike notion that she might be subject to comment. Certain natures enjoy being conspicuous, but Alice shrank from the sensation. And when she went to New York she wore the simplest of traveling suits, and purposely registered at a small and very quiet hostelry, exclusively reserved for women.

Yet, in her new mood, she had enjoyed writing that letter to Hallie, and she was inwardly elated as she visualized the scene her imagination had conjured up as being bound to occur when the girls would act upon her request. It was but the beginning of a series of surprises she was shrewdly planning for East Morton, and she meant to shroud her schemes in mystery until the very end.

The next step was to analyze herself physically. She did it in the hotel room with the aid of her mirror and the cleverness of her awakened mind. Her swarthy and oriental type of features suggested possibilities of adornment that would be denied to many women. Her first experiment was with her hair. When she had hit upon its new arrangement it might have been a Tartar damsel who peered into the glass. Long earrings of jet or jade would add to the picture, she decided, and resolved to purchase them promptly.

Personal appearance, however, was but a part of her plan. She meant to make herself the most talked of girl in East Morton and now she knew how she was going about it.

Early the next morning she convinced the forewoman of Gailliard Freres' special-

ty shop that she was deserving of a position in their gown-making rooms. The salary was trifling, but that did not matter to Alice. She was there to study and work, with a definite goal in mind.

This accomplished, she gave up her hotel room and took comfortable quarters in an up-town boarding-house. She meant to live upon her earnings as nearly as she could. Her income she wanted for other things, and the principal of her modest fortune was to be reserved for a future need which she had in view.

As the months slipped by she became an important figure in the Gailliard designing-rooms. By studying other women's needs in the matter of style she succeeded in establishing one for herself. And while she was busy with Gailliard's patrons she was working out certain conceptions that were to be hers, and hers alone.

The tailored things she conceived were smartly severe—not mannish—but unusual.

It had taken the brutal frankness of those who had criticized her at home to awaken this latent talent. Her ability had been lying dormant. Her very diffidence held it in suppression.

She was now running on a new road. It opened up vistas of which she had never dreamed, even when she had plotted her plan. The longer she went on with her work the more confidence she gained. Alice knew now that she could do the thing she wanted to do, and convinced of this, she began to design things for herself.

Barbaric! That was to be the keynote.

She fashioned afternoon frocks and evening gowns that were originally daring. Few women could have worn them, but they blended perfectly with the personality Alice was creating for herself.

In the keen enjoyment of visualizing herself wearing these things she did not neglect the business side of the bargain. At every opportunity she went into the show-rooms and by careful observation acquainted herself with selling methods.

Even her play was a part of the training she had allotted herself.

Sunday was her one day of recreation. She spent most of it in the open air—getting up early to go to the public links,

cantering along Riverside Drive or in Central Park.

During the week she spent two evenings at Columbia University, delving into subjects related to her work, taking courses in music and literature. On other nights she attended concerts at Carnegie Hall or went to see a worth while play.

She had sent her new address to Hallie, and had received one or two rambling letters in reply. The other girls had written, too, and Alice had answered their questions evasively.

She asked Marie to keep the hat she had admired, and begged Pauline to wear out the gown that had caught her fancy; but never a hint did she drop as to what she was really doing. To forestall any chance of their knowing, she had asked her quiet landlady to say to any chance callers that she did not know where Alice spent her days.

Bobby Trueman telephoned one evening when Alice was at home, but she pleaded fatigue, and her manner was so cold and distant that he never rang her again.

Spring drifted into summer, and Alice went abroad. It was a fleeting trip that gave her a glimpse of London and Paris for business reasons, and a look at Rome just for the love of its traditions. She came back to New York with a wealth of memories and a substantial redeemable balance of travelers' checks.

Her vacation, so called, was really nothing of the sort. It was a part of her education. She did it economically, as she did everything else—save one.

Clothes were her extravagance.

Poiret, Lanvin, and Jenny were commissioned to carry out Alice's ideas, and the trunks on which she paid heavy duty would have caused gasps of amazement from Hallie, Pauline, and Marie, just as Alice proposed that they should—a little later on.

Back in New York Alice registered at the Plaza, and immediately let it be known throughout women's wear selling circles that Mme. Alice had returned from Europe, and was prepared to receive the representatives of responsible firms who desired to sell her merchandise.

Her days were occupied in touring the smartest shops and haughtily examining the fads and fancies presented for purchase. Whatever she saw that appealed to her she instantly bought and had sent to her, collected, at her hotel.

Back in her room at the Plaza she wondered what else she ought to do to finish her knowledge of fabrics and fashions, and—of profits from selling them.

She finally recalled a man who lived in an up-town hotel. His name was Henry Lott, and she looked in the phone book to find him. He was cordial and more than willing to help her when she told him her story. And he promised never to breathe a word of her intentions to the folks in East Morton.

The next day she went to his office and bought quantities of textiles, tantalizingly tempting—fabrics she knew would appeal to the clientele of the little town that she meant to make capitulate and recognize her genius.

"Go to it, girl," was Lott's parting encouragement, "and if I can help you any more, or if you want anything in a hurry, just let me know. I rather think your account is going to prove a good one for the firm."

"One of these days I'll prove that you're right!" Alice laughed happily and gratefully.

IV.

LATE in the summer Job Harrington, East Morton's leading real estate agent, purchased a property on Center Street in the heart of the town's shopping section. Carpenters and decorators set to work at once, and the rumor spread that some exclusive New York firm was about to open a very novel establishment. But neither Harrington nor a curious feminine public knew the name of the firm or the nature of the new shop.

Then at last a little bronze plate was affixed beside the knocker on the quaint Old English door of the Elizabethan façade.

ALICE

That was all. No hint as to whether the place was to be a tea-room, a fancy

work-shop, or what-not. There was even a discussion as to whether the name should be given the French pronunciation or spoken in the usual way. No amount of advertising could have given such a keen edge to the curiosity of the maids and matrons of East Morton regarding the new emporium. And this was just what Alice intended. She wanted to spring her surprise without warning and take the town by storm.

The biggest joke of all was the fact that no one associated the name on the little bronze sign with Alice Blake. East Morton had forgotten her in the whirl of personal and social matters of far greater importance.

So when she finally alighted at the station and taxied to the house where Jane was patiently waiting to welcome her, no one even suspected that she had returned.

Nor did she phone any one. But the following morning the silken curtains of the shop-windows were raised, and the upper half of the old-fashioned divided door was opened invitingly. East Morton came to satisfy its curiosity and departed more curious than ever. There were two very pretty and capable attendants to show quite wonderful things in under and outer wear; the place was a dream of feminine luxury. And, more surprising than the lovely costumes offered, was the stunning proprietor of the shop.

Of course it was Alice. In a way, it was the same unaffected Alice they had always known—no frills, no uppishness, no attempts at a superior manner, yet a very different Alice. She was as homely as ever—but even the cattiest maiden and the most marveling matron agreed that a subtle, but decidedly noticeable change had come over her.

"It's positively unbelievable," declared Hallie Harmon's mother. "She might be some transported Balkan princess, so far as appearance is concerned—but she's just the same quiet, simple, bashful girl she used to be. And, my dear, I've never seen such lovely things. She says she designed them all herself and superintended their making!"

But if Alice appeared bashful on the sur-

face she was far from diffident beneath. She was a vastly changed girl and she was playing a rather difficult rôle extremely skilfully. She chatted with old acquaintances as though she had never been away, as though this metamorphosis had never taken place. She did not refer to the past nor declare her plans for the future. She was just Alice Blake, established in business and welcoming her friends to her shop.

They came, they bought and they gossiped. They returned and gossiped more. Alice was sowing new ideas of style in the minds of the feminine population of East Morton. They no longer went to New York to shop—they went to Alice Blake. Her place was pleasant, her prices were fearfully high, and the girl herself was delightful. Even the men of the town wished that she made things they could buy, so that they might have an excuse to enter the enchanting portals of the little Elizabethan place that had given East Morton builders a new thought in architecture.

Hers was easily the most distinctive business place in town—quite the most talked of, and by far the most prosperous. Invitations to teas and dinners poured in upon Alice, but she pleaded that she was now a "working-girl" and had no time for frivolity. All the hours she could spare from her shop and her home were devoted to the links or to the saddle. And on these occasions the men of East Morton learned to know the new Alice.

They found her extremely delightful, and her appearance on the porch of the Country Club was the signal for instant action among the bachelor members. They crowded around her, vied with each other to play around the course or to ride with her. They no longer resorted to drawing lots to decide who should take her to this or that function. No one of them would have consented to such a procedure, but each tried his best so to ingratiate himself as to be her accepted escort.

And none of them succeeded. Alice simply would not participate in the social activities at which her name was now the most important topic of conversation. Nor did she invite man, maid, or matron to visit her little home, now being done over in

accord with the modern ideas of the one-time ugly duckling.

The one indulgence she allowed herself in pleasurable performances was regular attendance at the Country Club dances. She always came alone and returned without escort in a taxicab. The grace of her dancing was as much a revelation to East Morton society as the other surprises she had sprung. Her costumes, on these occasions, were literally walking advertisements for her shop. She intended that they should be. That was why she went.

Bizarre as her habiliments were, Hallie Harmon admired them. She and the other girls envied Alice's ability to wear such creations. But the dark, almost oriental mystery of Alice permitted her to effect a style of dress that would have made the Little Lord Fauntleroy type of Hallie's pulchritude look ridiculous. And Hallie was now more charming than ever in her conventional beauty.

Alice was *different*, exotic, tempting, and utterly beyond the comprehension of those who had formerly regarded her as just a plain slip of a girl with a pudgy nose.

She became a veritable feminine Beau Brummel in East Morton. Whatever Alice wore was the vogue. It made no difference whether her copyist was blond or brunette, plump or thin, youthful or of the doubtful dowager age. Alice established the fashion and they followed.

Occasionally the mannerisms and little feminisms which her sedulous apes affected became them—but usually they did not. And therein lay Alice's little joke. She had learned through careful study that many modes were possible and becoming to her, but utterly impossible to the average type of attractive woman. She knew that she had no born beauty—but she had found out at last that she could make herself fascinating through careful adornment.

Yet it was not dress alone that accounted for her new charm. She had studied and read and developed a personality that was utterly fascinating. Those she encountered felt drawn to her. Every well-dressed woman in town was clothed at Alice Blake's shop, and not only in clothes, but in everything else, she soon grew to be a leader.

She gloried in her new rôle, now making one fad popular and then frowning upon it as too many folks took it up. She was laughing up her sleeve at them, and the one-time ugly duckling ruled the roost.

Girls with bobbed hair regretted the fact that they could not entwine their tresses about their heads as Alice did. Women who were plump and well-rounded longed for a figure as slim and willowy and yet as athletic as hers. And the men found her more than attractive, not only as a charming girl, but as a thorough sports-woman.

Bobby Trueman, who had been practically engaged to Hallie when Alice had returned to town, was now Alice's most ardent suitor. It was obvious that he was completely fascinated by her, and society was curious to see whether he could break through the icy reserve in which she held herself.

"Who ever would have thought that plain Alice Blake would have half the young eligibles in town dancing attendance after her?" demanded Pauline Thompson. "I suppose none of the rest of us will have a chance to marry until she accepts some man!"

But there seemed no likelihood of Alice becoming betrothed. Disgruntled at the failure of his efforts to impress Alice, Bobby Trueman grew morose and sullen—except when he was in Alice's society. And finally casting caution to the winds, he called at her house one evening, uninvited.

Alice had put in a busy day at the shop, and she was rather weary, but it was a weariness softened by the satisfaction of accomplishment. She was wearing a wonderful, simple negligée of Nile green, with great Egyptian earrings dangling at her throat. She might have been some ancient Eastern princess as she received him in the soft light of her living-room, and Bobby, swept away by the attractiveness of her, pleaded his cause at once.

"You know I love you, Alice!" he said eagerly. "I am rich enough to give you everything you can ever want, too. You can close the shop and—"

"Close the shop!" interrupted Alice. "Not for worlds. I'm in business to stay.

It's the greatest thing in my life—the thing that enabled me to find myself and prove to my friends that a girl doesn't have to be born beautiful to be popular."

"You *are* beautiful!" Bobby endeavored to take her hand. "You are simply wonderful to-night. Oh, Alice, *do* say yes!"

She smiled, reproaching him as a teacher might correct a naughty schoolboy.

"You're *not* in love with me, Bobby," she told him. "It's the girl who has come back—the girl whose clothes and business success have turned the heads of the town—that is the girl who fascinates you. And it is pure infatuation. You want to bask in the limelight of my success—to be able to say that I am *your* wife. No, Bobby, boy, it isn't love—it's pure and simple vanity, and you'll realize it some day."

"Alice!" he cried reproachfully. "You're unfair!"

"I'm not," she insisted. "You were engaged to Hallie when I returned. Go and marry her. You'll suit each other beautifully, and you and I would never hit it at all."

"Is there some one else—some one in New York, perhaps?" he asked.

She shook her head. "No, Bobby. I'm not interested in marriage or even in men. I'm in love with my business—my books, music, with the world. I suppose it's like everything else in life—when one attains an ambition it usually fails to satisfy. One seeks something more."

"Then why not marry me?" he persisted.

"No," she said gently, and a whimsical, good-humored smile crossed her face. "But it's pleasant to think you want me, Bobby. The ugly duckling you used to know would never have dreamed of such a proposal—and stripped of its fine feathers, the duckling would not be sought after now!"

"But you'll change your mind about marriage—some day," he insisted, "even if you don't change it with regard to me."

"Perhaps," mused Alice dreamily.

But she knew now that she could only love a man who would love her as she had been before she awakened. That was the tragedy of her triumph over East Morton.

Would she ever have the courage to become an ugly duckling again? And if she

did would any man fall in love with her, stripped of the barbaric splendor that won Bobby's avowal?

She did not know. Still, there was Henry Lott back in New York. He had helped her, perhaps some day she might—

"Perhaps," she murmured again as Bobby, quite forgotten by her, got up and left the room.

The conquest of East Morton over, Alice began mentally her advance upon New York.

Shelby's Head-On Crash

By Charles Wesley Sanders

Author of "Toole o' the Trolley," etc.



A NOVELETTE—COMPLETE IN THIS ISSUE

CHAPTER I.

RIGHT ON THE NOSE.

SHELBY was parting with his red stubble of beard, a necessary morning rite. He had got a fine lather working before the little mirror on the wall of the telegraph-office and had drawn the razor down one cheek. The clean, pink skin of health showed there.

Shelby had other signs of health about his person. He was a stocky youngster, a little short for his breadth of shoulder and thickness of chest; for, though he had not been able to add an inch to his stature, he had been able to build a fine layer of muscle over his body.

The face in the mirror was square. There were freckles on the rather short, upward-turning nose, and the cheeks spread away from the nose too flatly. But there was a pair of big, clear brown eyes in the face,

and the forehead was broad and white beneath a tangle of red hair that mocked brush and comb. Shelby was no ten-thousand-dollar beauty, but he was husky and very much alive.

Some stained firemen and head brakemen were inclined to consider him a "dood." Maybe he was. The blue serge pants he now wore were acutely pressed, and the tan shoes had a shine which would have permitted Shelby to become a member of the Ancient and Honorable Order of Boot-blacks when that had flourished, for Shelby had polished these shoes himself a bit ago. His shirt had cost two bones up in the village, and there was a near-Panama hat on the peg with his blue serge coat. A very white collar and a blue silk tie were on the table. The slightly worn collar which he had taken off the night before was in the cupboard with half a dozen mates.

This personal and sartorial description is given to indicate that Shelby was no slouch. It is rather pat, for Shelby had something coming to him that was to jar his serene young life; and the reader can judge for himself how fit our hero was to buck trouble.

Of course, he wasn't really a hero. He was just a healthy youngster who pounded brass for a living, ate and slept well, and liked a good time. He was lucky in that he chose innocent and clean good times. Otherwise he wouldn't have been so husky or have had that pink glow of health in his cheeks.

He finished that cheek and half of his chin, and then he stopped with his razor poised. The despatcher was calling him. He stood a moment, hoping the despatcher would desist till he had removed the last red whisker; but the despatcher refused to desist. In fact, he was showing impatience which, Shelby knew by the way the call was snapped out, would presently grow into anger.

Shelby said "Hell!" under his breath. He was not more profane than most men, but the provocation now was great.

"What the Sam Hill does he want?" he muttered. "I've O.S.'d everything, and there isn't a train near enough for him to want to put out an order here. Oh, well."

He put down the razor and opened the key and answered.

"Sigs on 187," said the despatcher.

Shelby opened his key and blankly stared at it. Then his eyes ran along the table. He had no sigs to give the despatcher; he hadn't had an order for anything in the last two hours. Before he had started to shave he had made out the transfer for the first-trick man, and it showed nothing on hand.

He might have been expected to tell the despatcher that, but the situation was not so simple. If the despatcher wanted sigs, he must think that Shelby had recently delivered an order. There was only one train to which he could have delivered it, and that was the first 88. The 88 had pounded into the east fifteen minutes before, past Shelby's clear block. Certainly he had had nothing for her.

"What?" he asked, and closed his key.

"Sigs on order 187 for first 88," the despatcher said in detail.

Shelby opened his key with a hand that was suddenly unsteady. He rumbled his red hair with his other hand, and again he stared along the table. Had he taken an order for the 88? Let him think. No, he had not. Darnation, there was the book of flimsy as he had made it up when he had delivered an order at five o'clock to a west-bound. He hadn't touched that book since. He'd swear to that.

"I didn't have anything for the 88," he said.

The despatcher said no more to him. He began to hammer out the call for the second station east of Shelby's.

The operator answered almost at once.

"Tt 89 by tr?" the despatcher asked.

"O.S., second 89 by six fifty," the operator reported.

There was another office between Shelby's and the office which had just reported the 89 by. But there was no third-trick man there. From eleven in the evening till seven in the morning the office was closed. The first-trick man came on duty at seven.

Shelby understood the situation readily enough. The 89 undoubtedly had a time or meet order with the 88 at this station. The despatcher thought he had put out the order to the 88 at Shelby's station. The 89 was now coming west on the 88's time, and the 88 was orderless. Unless that first-trick man showed up right on the dot the two trains were likely to hit each other on the nose, somewhere in his vicinity.

The sounder was singing now. The despatcher pounded out the call with increasing nervousness, signing his own call every two or three seconds.

Shelby sat back and looked at the clock. A feeling of helplessness, shot through with a sense of impending disaster, weighed him down. The clock marked six fifty-eight. He watched the minute-hand crawl up to seven, and then to a minute past seven.

And then the operator answered his call.

"Eighty-eight in sight yet?" the despatcher asked.

"Gone," the operator said. "Went by just as I got here."

The despatcher opened his key. Shelby could vision him leaning forward to it, getting himself together before he asked the second question.

"Eighty-nine tr?"

"Haven't seen 'em."

The thing was done. Shelby could see the 88 and the 89 crashing into each other just beyond the station somewhere. Unless the engine crews saw the oncoming engines in time and had a chance to jump, somebody might be pinned down in the wreckage of torn metal.

Shelby's head whirled, and he had a sickish feeling in the pit of his stomach. And then his brain cleared like a flash. What did the despatcher mean by asking him if he had delivered an order to the 88? Only one thing, Shelby grimly told himself. The despatcher had put out the order to the 89, and had neglected, for some reason, to put it out to the 88, the superior train. He recalled now that he had heard the despatcher calling the first station west of him for some time a while ago. The station had not answered. Shelby had paid no attention then to what had followed. He had been shining his tan shoes.

Well, by thunder, the despatcher wasn't going to stand from under and let the mistake fall on Shelby's shoulders! Shelby leaned forward and opened his key, but he kept the circuit closed with a long forefinger.

The night chief had come in on the wire and was calling the eastern terminal of the district. The eastern terminal answered at once. The night chief sent a message, ordering out a relief train, full force.

A feeling of isolation came over Shelby. The chief and the trick despatcher could momentarily drown their worry in a spell of activity; all Shelby could do was to sit there and wait.

The message ordering the relief train had just been sent when Andover, the station which had reported the 88 by, called the despatcher's office. The night chief answered steadily.

"They've either got together beyond the curve, or else they plugged 'em hard," the operator reported. "Some jam, anyhow."

The terminal yard office came in and

reported the relief train would be ready soon. The trick man put out the necessary orders. Then he called Andover again.

"Somebody's coming back now," Andover reported. "Let you know in a minute."

While he waited the despatcher took up the routine which the situation had developed. He put them into clear and arranged to have a couple of passengers cross over to a parallel road. Then Andover called again.

"Sweeney is here," Andover reported. "Says they got together just around the curve. Both engines off the track, and ten cars in the 88 and half a dozen in the 89 off. King, on the 88, has busted a leg; got caught between the tender and the engine when he started to jump. Nobody else hurt."

Shelby leaned back with a sigh of relief. King's leg would mend; the relief train would clear the track; the engines and the wrecked cars could be repaired. It wasn't so bad as if some one had been killed. He blessed all men who jump when there is nothing else to do.

And then his anger rose. The wreck was not so bad, but somebody was going to lose his job on account of it. In fact, somebody had automatically lost his job the minute the two trains struck. Who the somebody would be was to be determined by the facts.

But facts could be juggled. The despatcher was already juggling them by asking Shelby for sigs on an order which had never been sent. The despatcher was lying like a horse-thief. Prompt counter-action on Shelby's part seemed to be indicated.

He shoved his chair along till he was in front of the way wire. As he sat waiting for a chance to break in the first-trick man entered the office.

"New style of shaving?" he asked jovially, being fat and forty.

Shelby turned angry, smoldering eyes on him.

The first-trick man's face grew grave. He saw that something was amiss.

"What's up, kid?" he asked. "Get 'em together?"

"I didn't," Shelby retorted. "Thornton did."

The first-trick man walked over to the table.

"How'd it happen?" he asked.

"Thornton put out an order giving the 89 time on the 88," Shelby replied. "He called me a bit ago, and asked for sigs on the order to the 88. He never gave it to me. I haven't taken a thing in two hours. They got together just beyond Andover. Busted Jimmy King's leg for him, and spilled the engines and a bunch of cars over the right-of-way. Thornton is trying to nail me to a pole. I'll fix his clock for him."

"Thornton's a bad actor," the operator said. "Meanest guy in this State, bar none. He'll lie till he chokes. He's always standing from under. You want to look out for him when they get you all on the carpet."

"I'll cave his face in for him," Shelby said.

"That 'd do you no good," the first-trick man said sagely. "Better get yourself primed with dope. Somebody 'll be canned, you know—canned and sent out into the cold world all by his lonesome, no clearance, no nothin'. Bad business, son. You better get the chief on the wire and spill your tale before Thornton has talked him into believing it's a dead open-and-shut case against you."

"That's what I'm waiting for," Shelby said.

The business on the wire was finished for the moment. Shelby opened his key and tried to call the dispatcher's office. Somebody else wanted the office also, but Shelby felt his need to be imperative, and he took a chance on being called down for wire-fighting. Wire-fighting was a tame charge, anyway, compared to the one he must presently face.

The other operator desisted in a moment, and Shelby got the dispatcher's office.

"Chief?" he asked.

"I," said the operator laconically.

"Lemme speak to him a minute," Shelby said.

The operator held his key open for a moment.

"I, DK," the sounder then said.

"DK" was Drake, the day chief.

"This is Shelby, at Boynton," Shelby said. "Thornton thinks he gave me an order for that 88, but he didn't. I haven't had a thing here since five o'clock. I O.S.'d that 88, and he didn't say anything about sigs. I'm not in on this."

That seemed rather lame as he closed his key. The fact that Thornton had not asked for signatures to the order when Shelby had given his O.S. signified nothing.

On this road an order was made complete as soon as it was repeated by the operator. Signatures could be given any time. Thornton might have been busy and have waited to get the signatures later. That was often done.

But the chief had no criticism to make of Shelby's explanation.

"Hr," he said. "Take this: 'To Shelby, Boynton: Come in on No. 11. Report to superintendent's office on arrival.'"

Then he sent Shelby a pass on No. 11.

Shelby sat back in his chair and stared at the two pieces of clip.

"Buck up, kid," the first-trick man said. "If they put the blocks to you, you can come back. You're young and strong. You can land somewhere."

"Yeh," said Shelby. "I can see myself drifting around the country looking for a job, and being asked when and where and why, and saying I was canned because they said I had forgotten an order. It 'll be the Trail of the Lonesome Pining for yours truly. I'll be a hobo. I'll drift down, down. I'll probably take to drink and get the delirium tremens. I'll fill a drunkard's grave in a paupers' field."

"Mercy me, how young you are!" said the first-trick man. "A guy can certainly be solemn when he's twenty-two. I would not feel that bad if I lost my own job, and I've a wife and two children. Take a brace, boy."

"Oh, that was mostly conversation so I'd hear myself converse," Shelby said. "On the level, do you think Thornton will stick to it that he sent me that order when he knows in his soul that he didn't?"

"That's just the trouble," the first-trick man said, "Thornton ain't got no soul. He's got some kind of dry fillin' where his soul ought to be. Ever see him?"

"No."

"I have. Man and boy, so to speak, I've worked on this road for a score of years. Thornton was working days over on the other district when I came here, at the East End double track. Him and me never did get along. He was the despatcher's little boy blue at that time, because he always had his finger on the key. He's a fair operator, and he finally landed in the despatcher's office, copying. I never knew him to forget anything before. That 'll help him, and, take my word for it, he'll lie about this thing till he's black in the face."

"Who's copying for him?" Shelby asked hopefully.

"Jake Osborne," the other answered. "But don't you go banking on Jake. They are a pair to draw to. Jake's a bad egg, just between you and me. There's something crooked about him, though I don't know what it is for a fact. All I've heard is rumors, and I never repeat them. But a blind man could see this: Thornton isn't going to say he sent that order unless he has fixed things with Jake. You just watch and you'll see that Jake will say the order was sent all reg'lar and proper. When the super looks things over he'll find the order in the book all shipshape. You are being framed, youngster, and the only thing you can do is to keep your head and see if you can't find a hole to crawl through somewhere."

"Well," said Shelby, "he must have put that order out to the 89 along about Willow Creek. Willow Creek will know that he did not send it to me at the same time."

"Ed Jones works the third trick at Willow Creek," the operator said. "You better get him, and see what he has to say."

For the moment the way wire was idle. Shelby called Willow Creek, and got an immediate answer. All the operators would be on deck now to see what was going to happen.

Shelby knew that a hundred pairs of ears were listening to what he said.

"What's Jones's sign?" Shelby asked the other operator.

"JO."

"Is JO tr?" Shelby asked on the wire.

"I, JO," came the answer.

"Say," Shelby said, "did you get that order for the 89?"

"I."

"Did Thornton send it to me at the same time?"

Jones opened his key, and held it open for twenty seconds. Then he said "I.I.I.," and held it open again.

"What the dickens is he hesitating about?" Shelby asked the first-trick man.

"Ed is married," the other answered. "He's wondering which way the cat is going to jump. If Thornton can bull this through, you'll be canned. I guess Ed is considerin' that. It won't do him any good to line up against Thornton if Thornton is going to keep his job."

"I.I.," said Jones again, and then he quickly added: "I've got orders to report to the super's office. Can't say anything till then."

Shelby snapped the key shut and jumped up. "You can all go to the devil," he said. "Gosh, how that soap smarts my face!"

CHAPTER II.

ON THE CARPET.

SHELBY stepped down from No. 11 at division headquarters and proceeded to the super's office. Except King, of the broken leg, the two train crews were there, waiting in the super's outer office.

Shelby sat down beside Sweeney.

Sweeney was a big man, carrying an excess of fat on large bones. He was fanning himself with his straw hat, while sweat streamed down his broad face.

"Hot, isn't it, Sweeney?" Shelby said.

"It ain't the heat that gets me," Sweeney said. "This is the first time on the carpet for me, and I ain't very calm about it. I been sprigging around on railroads for a quarter of a century, and never no trouble before."

"You're not in any trouble," Shelby said. "All you've got to say is that you didn't get any order. That's all they'll ask you, very likely."

"But, gee-whiz," said Sweeney, "think of goin' in there and facing all them ginks. The super is there, and the trainmaster and the chief despatcher. I'd rather double ten times in one night in a blizzard than go in there."

"I'm not afraid of them," Shelby said with more confidence than he felt. "But I've got a scrap on my hands. Thornton is trying to frame me."

"Didn't he send you that order?" Sweeney asked.

"He did not."

"But says he did?"

"And says he did."

"The son of a gun," said Sweeney. "Ain't it the limit what a despatcher will do when he gets in a hole?"

"It is," Shelby said. "Have you seen Thornton?"

"He hasn't showed up yet," Sweeney answered. "He'll be here in a minute. I reckon they'll want to quiz him first. What 'll you do if he hands you a lemon?"

"I'm going to bust his face wide open," Shelby asserted.

Sweeney sat up, and the worried expression left his face.

"Well," he said, "mebbe I'll get something out of this business to pay me, after all. Where will you pull off that stunt?"

"I don't know. Depends on how mad I get."

"You redheads get mad sudden," Sweeney said. "Shouldn't wonder if you did it right here. If I'm called last, hold it till I come out, won't you?"

Before Shelby could answer two men came through the door from the hall. Shelby had never seen Thornton or his copier, Jake Osborne, but he recognized them now by some instinct. He was able to pick Thornton, too, from the first-trick man's remarks about him.

Thornton was forty-five, probably, a little stooped, bald as he took off his hat.

"It 'd be a shame to lick him," Shelby said.

Osborne was more of a man physically. He was taller than Shelby, but not so broad of shoulder. He had a dark, restless eye and jet hair.

"He looks like a dago," Shelby said to

himself. "He'll stick by Thornton sure. I'll bust his face, too, if he does."

Thornton and Osborne had just glanced toward Shelby. Doubtless they knew who he was, but if they did they gave no sign. Before they could sit down the door of the super's office was opened. The day chief stood on the threshold.

"Come in, Thornton," he said.

Thornton stepped inside with an air of confidence. Osborne walked to a window and stood looking out, his back to the other men in the room.

Thornton was in the super's office only a few minutes. He still had his air of confidence when he came out.

Osborne was called next, and the others in turn.

Shelby was last. In spite of himself, his heart was going pit-a-pat as he entered the office and the chief closed the door behind him.

The super was sitting at his desk. The trainmaster was across from him. The chief took a chair beside the trainmaster. Shelby glanced at the three officials, and then his eyes lighted on a big man sitting in a corner, his arms folded on his chest, his eyes on Shelby's face.

"Hello, Silent," Shelby said.

Silent Simpson, the company's chief of police, only nodded. He was a man who usually saved his words as a miser hoards his pennies.

The super tapped on the blotting-pad on his desk with a long yellow pencil. There was a moment's silence in the room; then the super looked up suddenly. His eyes were sharp and cold as Shelby looked into them.

"Shelby," he said, "what became of the order that Thornton sent to you for the 88 this morning?"

Shelby felt his blood rush into his cheeks. His temper boiled up and threatened to overflow. So the super, without a word from himself, already believed that Thornton had sent that order.

Shelby swiftly perceived that a show of temper would hurt him now. He fought to keep his poise. It was half a minute before he could speak. Then he said in a low voice:

"Does Thornton say he sent me such an order?"

"He says so."

"What does the copier say?"

The super smiled in a rather superior way.

"Is this my investigation or yours, Shelby?" he asked. "What anybody else has said here doesn't matter just now. We want to know what you have to say."

"I say no order for the 88 was sent to me," Shelby said. "I touched my key only once when there was any mention of the 88; that was when I O.S.'d her. Thornton didn't ask for signatures then. He did not say anything. I had nothing for the 88, and I let her by."

"Did you hear the order sent to Willow Creek for the 89?"

"I didn't. I wasn't paying any attention."

"What were you doing at ten minutes past six this morning?"

"Shining my shoes."

"Oh," said the super, and he glanced at Shelby's bright shoes as if they might give him a clue. Then he added: "See if Jones has come in, Drake."

The chief went to the door, stood there a moment, and called Jones's name. "JO" of Willow Creek came. Shelby half rose.

"You may remain, Shelby," the super said. "We have about finished."

He turned to Jones.

"You took an order for the 89, giving her time against the 88?" the super asked.

"Yes, sir."

"What were the circumstances?"

Jones cleared his throat, rubbed his nose nervously, and said:

"Well, Thornton called me and told me to copy three. I took down a book and got the stylus, and Thornton began to call Trumbull. He couldn't get Trumbull just then."

Jones cleared his throat and rubbed his nose again.

"Go on," said the super evenly.

"Well, he called for a while, and then he gave me the order for the 89. When he had finished he called Trumbull again. Trumbull didn't answer. Well, then he told me to go ahead."

"And you repeated the order?"

"Yes, sir."

"And Thornton gave you complete before it had been put out to the 88?"

"Yes, sir."

"Did you hear Thornton call Trumbull afterward?"

"No, sir."

The super leaned forward, and his eyes were sharper than ever.

"Well, did you hear him call Shelby's office? Did you hear him give that order to Shelby for the 88?"

Jones suffered an agony of embarrassment. He twisted his hat in his hands, and failed to meet the super's eyes.

"No, sir, I didn't hear him give it to Shelby. I took a message on the way wire, and then I swept out the office. I didn't know anything had gone wrong till I heard the despatcher begin to call Andover. I knew from the way he was jerking out the call that there was something wrong."

"That's all, Jones," the super said.

Jones left the room. Shelby sat erect in his chair. He knew that the climax had come. Probably the super had already made up his mind.

"Drake," he said to the chief, "you can see how matters stand. Thornton says he sent that order to Shelby. Osborne says he did, too. Of course, Thornton is culpable for giving the complete to the order to the 89 before he had put out the order to the 88. Still there wouldn't have been a wreck if the order had been delivered to the 88 at Boynton. Osborne seems to be let out of it. Thornton will have to be suspended. I don't care for that kind of despatching myself. If he indulges in it again—"

He shrugged his shoulders and took up a pile of papers from his desk. The train-master and the chief rose. Shelby, too, stood up.

His face was as red as his hair now. He was mad clear through. He walked over to the super's desk and stood in front of it.

"Well, what about me?" he asked thickly. "What do I get?"

"I presume Mr. Drake will have something to say to you," the super said coldly.

Under his coldness the super was angry about the wreck, naturally enough. Of course, it was not directly his fault, but with the men above him everything that went wrong on the division was his fault. He had a notion that Shelby had got the order and had forgotten it. What made the case all the more irritating was the fact that if Shelby had handled the order properly he would have saved Thornton from the accident which Thornton had laid himself wide open to have happen.

The super's coldness angered Shelby the more. He felt as if he had banged a stone wall with his fist. The impact, so to speak, left his knuckles bare and bleeding.

"Haven't you got nerve enough to say it yourself?" he asked hotly.

The moment he had uttered the words he knew that he had been a chump. Goaded by his superior wouldn't get him anywhere. He had a fight on his hands, but the fight was not with the super. It was with Thornton and Osborne, who had borne false witness against him.

But regret did him no good. The super raised his eyes. They were like two gray stones.

"You're discharged," he said.

"But Thornton didn't send that order to me," Shelby ground out. "Damnation, it's been shown that he broke the rules by giving complete first to a train of inferior rights. That ought to convict him. He simply forgot all about the order to the 88 after he had fixed out the 89. And I'm the goat."

The super's glance went past Shelby to Drake.

"That will be all," he told the chief.

"That's all, Shelby," the chief repeated. "Come on."

"Do I get any kind of a clearance?" Shelby asked.

"I'll just have to state the circumstances," Drake answered.

"You can keep it, then," said Shelby.

He stalked from the room ahead of Drake and the trainmaster. The train crews, Jones, and Thornton and Osborne were still in the outside room.

"I want to see you a minute, Thornton," Drake said.

"Yes, sir," Thornton said.

The chief moved toward the door. Thornton rose to follow him. The chief passed through the door. Thornton came to it. But before he could step into the hall Shelby placed himself in front of him.

"Just a minute, Thornton," he said.

"Well, what is it?" Thornton snarled.

"Did you send that order to me?"

"I did. Osborne copied it at the time. He says I did. I'm not asking any one to take my word for it."

"You're a liar, and Osborne too," Shelby declared.

Thornton stepped back. He knew he was no match for the irate redhead in front of him, and he was not a man who would go gaily into physical combat with any kind of antagonist.

The chief came back to the doorway.

"Stop that talk, Shelby," he said sternly. "You can't carry on like that around here. You're on company property, you know."

"To hell with the company and its property!" Shelby cried. "I'm going to get even with this guy."

He suddenly struck Thornton on the mouth with the back of his hand. Even in his rage he saw that it would be unsafe to strike the little man with his fist.

Thornton reeled back, his hand to his mouth. He was white and shaking.

"You lied, and you know it," Shelby said, taking a forward step. "Why don't you tell the truth? Tell Drake that you never sent that order. If you don't, I'm going to put you out of commission. When I strike you again it won't be with the back of my hand. I could shoot your heart out, the way I feel now."

Osborne suddenly stepped in front of him. Osborne was cool. Shelby saw that he had the courage that Thornton lacked.

"Perhaps you'll shoot mine out, too," Osborne said.

Shelby had had a feeling all along that Osborne's false witness against him was even more vicious than Thornton's. Osborne had no reason to lie about the order, except that possibly he wanted to stand in with Thornton. That reason seemed scarcely sufficient when Shelby thought about it.

Thornton's dismissal from the service would not have carried Osborne's dismissal. In fact, now that it occurred to Shelby, Osborne would probably have stepped into Thornton's shoes if Thornton had been discharged. It was rather queer.

"Why did you lie about that order, Osborne?" Shelby asked.

A maddening, supercilious smile came to Osborne's lips. He thrust his face slightly forward. As Shelby looked into his eyes he saw that they were hard eyes, cruel, set a little too close together.

"Why should I lie about it?" Osborne asked. "What had I to gain by saying Thornton didn't send the order to you? I thought at first you were only careless. Now I see you're a damned fool."

The reiteration of the charge against him was the last straw for Shelby. His rage burned up in him consumingly. He lost all his judgment. Osborne was a bigger man than he was. He had lied about him, and now he called him a fool. Let him take his medicine.

During this Drake, who was the only one who might have interfered, had been listening, hoping that, in their anger, one of the men would say something which would clear up the mystery. Drake was not altogether convinced that Shelby had forgotten the order. But he had to abide by the fact that the evidence had been against Shelby.

He was not prepared for the violence of Shelby's next act. Shelby set himself on his feet and his right fist suddenly shot up against Osborne's jaw. It was the blow of a man who kept himself in good physical condition. The contact was perfect. Osborne dropped.

To a raging man swift victory is inflaming. Shelby stepped back and turned to the group near the door.

"Maybe some of the rest of you would like a little of this," he said.

The others stood silent before his red wrath. Osborne was getting slowly to his feet. The flame of Osborne's anger was burning as hotly as Shelby's. He stood an instant, waiting for his head to clear, then he moved toward Shelby with his hands up. But before he could strike the door of the

super's office was thrown open. There was a quick step back of Osborne. He was thrust aside as if he had been a child.

Shelby wheeled about. He faced Silent Simpson.

Simpson laid a heavy hand on Shelby's arm and his fingers bit into Shelby's flesh.

"That's enough, youngster," Simpson said quietly. "You better come with me and take the air."

"I won't do it," Shelby cried. "I'm going to settle this thing right now."

He struggled to free himself, but Simpson only stepped behind him, took hold of his other arm, and pushed him toward the door. Despite his resistance, Shelby found himself at the head of the stairs.

"Go right along down," Simpson said. "I'll be at your heels. I don't think it will get you anything to try to fight with me."

Shelby knew that. Besides, he trusted Simpson. Simpson's record was as clear as glass. There was not a drop of dishonesty in him. Shelby understood his interference was prompted by good sense. He went slowly down the stairs and out into the summer sunshine. Simpson came out behind him.

"What're you going to do now?" Simpson asked.

"I don't know," Shelby answered. "I've got to look for a job."

"If I were you I'd stick around for a while and keep in touch with me," Simpson suggested.

"What do you mean, Silent?" Shelby asked.

"Just what I say. There may be something doing in this thing presently."

"I didn't forget that order, Silent," Shelby broke out. "Thornton didn't send it to me. Do you think I wouldn't stand the gaff if I had got an order and failed to deliver it? Do you think I would destroy it and say I had never received it?"

"I don't think you would," Simpson said.

"You think Thornton forgot to send the order, then?"

"Stick around and keep in touch with me," Simpson said. "Here's my phone number. Call me up to-night."

He scribbled the number on the page of

a note-book, tore out the page, and handed it to Shelby.

Then he turned and walked away from him along the platform. "I'll stick," Shelby told himself, "and try to keep my head."

CHAPTER III.

THE GIRL IN THE RAIN.

SHELBY walked slowly up-town, thinking things over. His present financial condition had to be considered. An operator can't buy flowers and candy and hire an occasional automobile, going home from a dance or for a trip into the country, and still pile up a bank account. Shelby was guiltless of the possession of a pass-book. He had had ten dollars left out of his last pay. He now had three days coming from the company.

"I wish I'd been satisfied with my old suit," he complained to the blue serge. "I'm glad my board is paid, anyhow."

He dismissed finances for the moment, because he could see that thought of them was bringing a cloud of worry up over his mental horizon. He mustn't worry; he had too much to do.

He reverted to Silent Simpson. What had Silent been doing at the investigation? Ordinarily an investigation didn't call for the presence of a detective. Silent might just have happened in, but very likely he had not. Shelby knew him for a lonesome prowler, going about his business in his own way. Probably he had been keeping his eye on somebody. And Shelby didn't suppose that somebody was himself.

Silent's ready belief in Shelby's innocence backed up that notion. Was he on Thornton's trail, then? Did he know something about the forgotten order which nobody but himself and Thornton and Osborne knew?

Well, he couldn't depend upon Silent altogether. He might have to do a little sleuthing himself. It was his fight. With all he had at stake, he ought to be able to make as important discoveries as Silent could be expected to make.

What, he wondered, was Thornton's

mode of private life? Was he married? Where did he live?

He turned into a drug-store presently and looked up Thornton's name in the directory. He found that the despatcher lived only half a dozen blocks from the railroad. Having nothing but time on his hands, he walked back to the street where Thornton lived.

It was a pleasant street, with big trees lining it and with pretty white houses standing in trim lawns. He came at length to the house number he had found in the directory. The house was somewhat larger than the others. In a front window there was a modest sign with "Boarding" on it in gilt letters.

"Not married," said Shelby to himself. He walked back up-town. He spent the day idly, waiting for nightfall, so that he might call up Simpson.

When he did call him Simpson answered the phone himself.

"Anything doin'?" Shelby asked.

"Not to-night," Silent said. "Call me again in the morning."

"What happened to Thornton?" Shelby said.

"Laid off indefinitely."

"The super said he ought to be suspended. Why didn't they put a time-limit on it?" asked Shelby.

"I suppose they got a new hunch," replied Simpson.

Shelby considered that a moment in silence. "Did you put a bug into the super's ear, Silent?" he asked then.

"Call me in the morning," Silent said. "By the way, how are you fixed for money?"

"Got plenty," Shelby returned hardily.

"Good-by," Simpson said, and hung up.

Shelby went out in to the street, more puzzled than ever by Simpson's conduct. He knew that Simpson was no philanthropist. He was a policeman first, last, and all the time. His experiences with crooks of various kinds had hardened him and bred his habit of silence in him.

There was no reason why he should proffer aid to Shelby any more quickly than he would have done to any other down-and-outer. They were not personal friends.

Shelby had been with the road only a year. He had met Simpson perhaps half a dozen times. But he knew that Simpson was taking a more friendly attitude toward him than the detective took toward most men.

Undoubtedly Simpson had something beyond his cuff. Shelby wished he knew what it was.

He had eaten nothing since morning, and his young appetite was beginning to clamor. He went to a modest restaurant near by. He did not notice as he entered it that a man stopped across the street.

As Shelby ate his supper this man went into the drug-store. He telephoned hurriedly.

Shelby was just paying his check when a messenger-boy entered the restaurant and approached him.

"You Shelby?" he asked.

"That's me," Shelby said.

"Message for you," the boy said. "Shove a pencil along that line."

Shelby signed for the message. He was so anxious to know what it was and whom it was from that he did not think to ask the boy how the latter had known that he was in the restaurant.

On his part the boy did not wait in the expectation that Shelby would slip him a dime. He seemed to be a very busy little messenger. He stuffed his book into his pocket and skipped out into the night.

Shelby paid his check and walked to the door. There, in the light from within, he slit the envelope. The message was written on company stationery. Shelby read it half a dozen times in blank amazement. Then he stuffed it into his pocket and stood staring into the street.

With twilight, clouds had banked up in the northwest, and now rain was falling steadily. There were mutterings of thunder and now and then a long-held flare of lightning.

Shelby forgot about his new serge suit. He stepped out into the rain and started for Thornton's boarding-house.

For this was the message:

They've suspended me indefinitely. I'm practically fired. Come and see me to-night at eight o'clock. Be prompt. I've got something to tell you.

Thornton's name was signed to the message.

Shelby proved himself a poor sleuth just then. He did not notice that the message, including the signature, had been written on a typewriter. He was too eager to see Thornton to heed externals. Perhaps Thornton had had a change of heart and was going to confess his blame for the wreck.

With his coat-collar held up about his throat he hurried through the rainy streets. In a short time he was opposite Thornton's boarding-house. It was very dark beneath the big trees, but an occasional flash of lightning split the darkness.

Shelby's first eagerness had died. Suspicion had come to replace it. It seemed quite unlikely, in his change of mood, that Thornton was going to confess. He wasn't that kind of man, Shelby feared. Even if he lost his job, he would not make reparation. He would face the problem of getting another job, and if he confessed his responsibility for the wreck he would have a harder time than if he continued to lay the blame on Shelby. He could still call on Osborne to vouch for his having sent the questioned order.

Doubt lent Shelby mental acuteness. He decided to move slowly, to consider what he should do if Thornton was not square with him. Certainly he must not lose his temper. He must keep cool and match his own cunning against Thornton's.

So he crossed the street and rang the door-bell. A woman clad in a raincoat and carrying an umbrella came to the door.

"Is Mr. Thornton in?" Shelby asked.

"He isn't just now," the woman answered. "He had a phone call fifteen minutes ago and went out. Said he would be back shortly, so I could tell anybody who called him up to call again. Will you wait?"

"No, I'll come back," Shelby said.

He went down the steps and recrossed the street. He wasn't going to sit in the parlor of Thornton's boarding-house and mark time for Thornton.

He stood under the trees, watching the house in the recurring flashes of lightning. He became aware presently that he was

wet through. The trees, while they warded off the rain directly, dripped big drops on him. His wet clothing made him uncomfortable and brought depression to his spirits.

He was young and he was facing trial for the first time. He had never been in trouble before. He had learned telegraphy easily when he had left high school and had had no trouble in getting a job. Ambition had brought him from the jerkwater road on which he had made Mr. Morse's acquaintance to this bigger road, where he had expected opportunity to be greater.

And now somebody had opened the gate on him when he had seemed to be hitting a good clip and he had gone all over the right-of-way.

He was roused from these somber thoughts by the sight of a woman going up the steps of the boarding-house. She paused before the door and stood with her finger on the button of the electric-bell. Then the lightning died away.

Shelby waited. He wondered about her. She was not a dweller in the house. If she had been she would have had a key.

The landlady opened the door in a moment, and after a brief exchange of words the girl stepped inside. The door was closed. A few minutes passed and the landlady came out and started rapidly down the street, her umbrella over her head. Shelby saw these two developments by flashes of lightning which were becoming more widely separated.

He saw that the storm was dying out and that he must have a closer view if he were to keep in touch with what was transpiring over there. He hurried across the street and stood under the trees on that side. His impatience made his wait seem long. But the girl had been in the house scarcely ten minutes when she emerged. Shelby heard the night-latch click behind her. She descended the steps and passed so close to him that he could see, in spite of the umbrella she held over her head, that she was young and graceful.

She hastened down the street.

"They say there's generally a woman mixed up in everything," Shelby said to himself. "I'll just see about this."

He followed the girl to the corner of the next street. There was a car line here. The girl stopped and glanced up the street. She stood fully revealed in the light from the arc-lamp above her. Shelby, pausing, had a chance to observe her.

The girl seemed to be waiting for a car. Presently Shelby approached her and stood within three feet of her. Out of the corner of his eye he saw her throw a quick glance in his direction.

Susceptible Shelby thrilled under that glance, for it came from as pretty a pair of Irish gray eyes as he had ever had turned in his direction.

But he seemed to be merely a young man waiting for a car, and the one glance was all the girl favored him with. She turned her gaze in the quarter from which she expected the car to come. Its light came into view in a few minutes.

While the car rapidly approached Shelby stood in indecision. It was only a hunch that had made him follow the girl—a hunch born of the fact that she had spent a few minutes alone in the house in which Thornton lived. She might never have heard of Thornton. On the other hand, she might be closely associated with him.

Should he board the car and see where she went? If he did so, he might miss Thornton. If he did not, he might allow an actor in his drama to elude him.

The car was stopping before he decided. The Irish gray eyes had been turned on him again and he saw that into them a little question about his being there had dawned. If the girl were wondering about him, he would be wise to wonder about her. He followed her on board the car.

She went to the middle of it. He sat down near the door. Then he raised his eyes. Her eyes, filled with interrogation now, were on his face. As their glances met a flush dyed her cheeks. She looked away quickly.

They rode half a dozen blocks and then the girl reached up and pressed the button. Shelby was just behind her as she stepped to the ground. He was a little uncertain now as to what he was going to do.

He had followed her in vain if he did not speak to her, but he was at a loss for an

excuse for doing that. The girl walked briskly over to the curb. Shelby followed more slowly. The girl turned into a side street. Shelby followed after. He decided to see the thing through. There was a street lamp half a dozen houses away, and he made up his mind to speak to her when they came within the light of the lamp.

As she neared it he quickened his footsteps. He was only a few paces behind her. He was about to speak to her when she suddenly stopped and turned toward him.

Shelby came to a dead halt, rooted there in amazement. The girl stood looking at him. Then she moved toward him.

"Well," she demanded, "what is it you wish?"

"I—I—" Shelby stammered and then he stopped.

He perceived that whatever else the girl lacked she did not lack self-possession. The gray eyes were quite cold. Her voice had been perfectly steady. Shelby suffered an agony of embarrassment. He felt as a cheap masquerader must feel when he is suddenly turned upon.

Nevertheless, he had a flash of intuition about the girl. He saw that her present attitude was in line with her going alone to Thornton's boarding-house. Unquestionably she was associated with Thornton somehow. She seemed, in some strange way, to lack girlishness. She was full of a hard hostility as she stood there.

"What do you want?" she demanded anew. "You were following me."

"I wondered what you wanted to see Thornton about," Shelby said.

"How did you know I wanted to see Thornton?"

Her question gave him courage. Certainly she knew Thornton. If she had not known him, her first question would have been as to his identity.

"Because you went to his house and found him away. You went inside to wait for him. Then you changed your mind and left."

"How did you know he was away?"

"Because I had just asked for him myself."

A change came over the girl. The coldness in her gray eyes was replaced by a

look of shrewdness. She took a step toward Shelby.

"You are a friend of his and of Osborne's, are you?" she asked.

It seemed to Shelby that her tone intimated that she was not a friend of either of those two. He took his cue from that.

"I'm not a friend of theirs," he declared. "Just the opposite. My name is Shelby."

"Shelby?" she said. "Oh!"

She had undergone another change. Shelby felt that she was her real self now. The coldness and the shrewdness were both gone from her eyes. They were only wide with eagerness.

"You know who I am?" he asked.

She nodded.

"You know, then, that I am in trouble on the road. I saw you go to Thornton's boarding-house and I hoped you might know something about him—about that order that caused my discharge. Of course that sounds kind of foolish, but I thought if you knew Thornton you might have talked to him about the order. He might have said more to you than he would to any one else. I—I—well, that's how it is."

The girl did not smile. She continued to look at him with her wide, lovely eyes.

"Yes, I had heard about the order," she said at last. "But it was not that that was taking me to see Thornton, of course. It was something else."

She took her breath quickly between her parted lips. The eagerness in her eyes increased till they glowed with it.

"Is it true that Thornton was responsible for the wreck?" she asked.

"He was responsible," Shelby replied. "He never sent the order to me—or to any one else. Perhaps you don't understand how the thing could happen. I—"

"But I do," she interrupted. "My father was trainmaster on the road till he died, a year ago. I know something about railroading."

"Sutherland was your father?" Shelby asked.

"Yes."

Shelby stood looking at her. Sutherland's death had been almost coincident with his advent on the road. He had never met Sutherland, but now in the dim re-

cesses of his brain some story which had been traveling up and down at that time stirred in its sleep. But it promptly dropped off again. All his efforts failed to rouse it.

"What are you thinking about?" the girl asked.

"Well, you can see that I've got to clear myself," Shelby evaded. "Would you mind telling me what you wanted to see Thornton about?"

"I can't tell you that."

"Do you know Thornton well?"

"I have known him ever since he has been running trains here, ever since I was a little girl."

"He's the kind of man that would stand from under, isn't he?"

The girl glanced about her as if she feared some one might be listening. When she turned back to Shelby, there was hope in the gray eyes.

"They say you struck Thornton and Osborne, too, in the superintendent's office?" she said.

"And I wish I had finished the job," he said bitterly.

She laid a hand on his arm.

"You intend to pursue Thornton till you establish the fact that he did not send that order?"

"If it takes me all my life," he said.

Till that moment he had had no clear perspective of what he had been going to do, but now it seemed to him that he had intended all along never to give up till he had cleaned the slate. Those gray eyes were very compelling.

"Well, to answer your question," she said, "Thornton is a coward and a black-guard."

Young Shelby felt at that instant as if he had crossed the line which divides youth and manhood. A face which had been youthfully pleasant before hardened into grim lines now.

"Look here," he said tensely. "Has Thornton done something to you, too? If he has, I'll—"

A sudden coolness came to her—not the coldness of a moment ago, but an increase in her self-possession. She took her hand from his arm as if she had suddenly realized that it lay there.

"You can't meet Thornton with force," she said. "Two big men might settle an argument that way, but rashness on your part will only put you more at Thornton's mercy."

"I know that," Shelby said rather sheepishly. "I keep going up in the air, but I'm fighting to stay on earth."

"How did you happen to be at Thornton's to-night?" she asked.

"He sent for me—sent a note to a restaurant where I was eating my supper."

"How did he know you were at the restaurant?"

Shelby took off his hat and rumbled his red hair. He saw that while he was as old as this girl in years he was not so old in wisdom.

"I give it up," he said.

"Have you the note he sent you?"

He drew it from his pocket and handed it to her.

"May I keep it?" she asked.

"Why, yes," he answered. "It's no good to me."

She looked at him and smiled a little. She was a woman now, smiling at a boy. Shelby flushed.

"Oh, I know I'm a chump," he said.

"I go around smashing people when I ought to be keeping quiet and using my brains."

"I wish you would go back to Mr. Thornton's and see what he wants," the girl said.

"I can do that, anyhow," Shelby said.

"Let me know in the morning what you find out," she said. "My telephone number is in the book—still in my father's name, James Sutherland."

"All right," Shelby said.

"Good night," she said, and gave him a little smile.

She turned about and walked rapidly down the street. The darkness took her.

Shelby returned to the car line and boarded a car. He rode to the street on which Thornton lived. He went up the street on the side on which Thornton's boarding-house was located. As he neared it he saw some people at the front door.

He stopped at the end of the walk and stood looking up at the group. One of the men was a policeman in uniform.

The rain had ceased altogether now and the clouds had drifted out of the sky. Shelby could be discerned from the front porch.

As he waited in indecision a woman's voice suddenly broke the silence:

"There he is, officer. That's the man, standing right down there."

CHAPTER IV.

HUNTED.

THE policeman turned, looked at Shelby, and then came swiftly down the steps. There was aggressiveness in his manner.

"Hey, you," he said. "Just a minute. I want you."

Shelby had a few seconds of paralysis. This sudden change in the state of affairs left him for that space incapable of action.

The policeman was half-way down the walk when it dawned upon Shelby that the policeman intended to lay restraining hands on him. He could tell that by the policeman's manner.

That left Shelby with a single idea. He forgot about Thornton; he forgot about the girl. He only knew that he was not going to let those big, red hands fall upon him. He turned and fled.

He had no notion except to put as much space as possible between himself and the policeman. He believed he was fleet of foot than the officer. The latter's size would not be calculated to make him speedy.

At first it seemed as if his task would be easy. Behind him he could hear the heavy pad-pad of the policeman's feet. His own tan shoes were click-clicking, four clicks to one pad. He heard the policeman cry out and cease running.

Shelby looked back. The policeman had stopped. Shelby could just make out his figure.

"Hi," said Shelby to himself. "Winded already, are you?"

He thought his getaway was assured, but he had not reckoned with the powers of the police in an emergency. There was the sound of a shot. At the same instant he felt as if he had been bitten in the left shoulder.

"Great guns, I'm shot!" he said aloud.

He stopped for just an instant. He had never been shot before, and he didn't know but that he might suddenly pitch forward on his face, or crumple slowly to the ground, or slip into a black pit, or do one of those disconcerting things that people do when they get a bullet into their anatomy.

To his surprise he found that he was as strong as he had been. His shoulder smarted a little, but that was all. He put his hand on the shoulder, but there was no blood on it when he withdrew it. His coat was free from any widening red stain.

"I guess I'm still all here," he said. "But that cop is coming fast again."

He dodged beyond a tree and saw that he had put a line of them between him and his pursuer. He ran at top speed on the grass. There was the sound of another shot, but he did not hear the bullet. He guessed it must have buried itself in one of the trees.

He was nearing the street car line again now and he had to make up his mind quickly what he was going to do. He recalled that the car on which he and the girl had ridden had been bound toward town. That direction, he supposed, would be the most dangerous for him. What lay in the opposite direction he did not know, but he assumed that open country was not far off.

The railroad offices were in the manufacturing district of the town, and that he was aware in a general way was in the outskirts. He decided to turn to his right. To do so he must emerge from the shelter of the trees and be revealed by the arc light.

He took the chance. Back of him he heard the policeman's revolver speak again, but the sound was fainter than it had been. He judged the policeman had stopped or else he was slower even than Shelby had supposed him to be.

He found himself now on a hill which sloped gently for some distance. He did not slacken his speed, but as he ran he tried to remember what policemen did in cases like this. All he knew was what he had read in the newspapers from time to time. That reading had been indifferent. He supposed there would be a general alarm for him.

As that thought struck him every shadow held a policeman. He darted his glance from right to left. But he saw no one.

When he reached the bottom of the hill he saw that ahead of him the buildings thinned out. The last arc light was not more than a quarter of a mile away. If he could pass that last light he would be safer. By now he was gasping for breath and he had an ache in his left side. With a hand pressed against his side he jogged on.

He perceived the light in safety, and then just beyond him he saw a railroad crossing. He perceived that he had come about in a half-circle and had reached the road he had lately worked for. He went out on the track and looked up and down. Just then there was nothing in sight, but a moment later he saw an engine's headlight appear around a curve. The light was just moving. The figure of a man showed in it, and he ran ahead and threw the switch. The engine nosed in on a siding and stopped. Shelby knew the engine would not have stopped just there if there had been a train behind it. He observed that there were white lights on the engine.

"An extra east, running light," Shelby said to himself.

The extra, apparently having plenty of time, had stopped while the flagman closed the gate. Now the engine came slowly along the siding. Shelby could readily dope out the situation. The extra had a meet here and the meet was not very close. They were drifting down to the east end to wait for the opposing train.

He knew all the conductors on the district, of course. They were like the common run. Some of them were good scouts; some were crabs. He would be taking a chance if he got aboard the caboose.

Nevertheless, when the rear steps were opposite him he swung himself up. A man who had been leaning down on the other side turned to him. It was Sweeney.

"Hop down, son," Sweeney said. "This is no passenger train."

"Sweeney, it's me, Shelby," Shelby gasped.

Then, spent by exertion and excitement, he dropped down on the step. Sweeney crossed to that side and hung above him.

"For the love of Mike, what's happened to you?" Sweeney asked. "You look like you'd been through a cyclone."

"Lemme get my breath," Shelby pleaded.

He sat in silence while the engine and caboose went down to the east switch. Sweeney, to whom Shelby's knockdown of Osborne was still a sweet and vivid recollection, let him take his time. At last Shelby stood up.

"Where's your flagman, Sweeney?" he asked.

"Inside, eatin' a bite," Sweeney answered.

Shelby laid a hand on the fat man's shoulder and turned appealing eyes on his face. In fact, Shelby was pretty much shaken. He had had some trouble and he was beginning to have more. He was realizing slowly that he was somehow a fugitive from the law.

"Sweeney, have you got any old duds in the hack?" he asked.

"Huh?" said Sweeney.

"Any old clothing in the wagon? Anything I could put on?"

"Oh, I see," said Sweeney. "You're figuring on hittin' the grit just because you lost your job. Now, son, I wouldn't do that. I—"

"It isn't that," Shelby said. "I'm running away from the police."

"From the police?" Sweeney repeated. "Are they tryin' to pinch you for the wallop you put on Osborne?"

Shelby could have fallen on Sweeney's neck and wept. The explanation was ridiculously simple. And it dovetailed with everything that had happened that evening. Osborne had sworn to a warrant for his arrest. Thornton had summoned him to his own house, so that he could be easily apprehended by the policeman whom Thornton would have there.

"I guess that's it," Shelby said. "I'm not sure. I ran away."

"I don't blame you," Sweeney said. "They'd give you at least ten dollars and costs and thirty days for it. I'd rather run a couple of blocks than serve that sentence. You wait here just a minute or two."

Sweeney stepped into the caboose. The

engine had stopped at the east switch by now and was standing there with dimmed headlight. In a moment Sweeney came out. He had a bundle in his hand.

"Here's a pair of overalls and a jumper and a cap," he said. "If you get into a tight place you just slip into 'em and smudge your face some and they'll take you for a tallow or a shack on his way home. Oh, just a minute more."

He went back into the caboose again. When he came out he had a dinner-bucket in his hand.

"I don't know who this belongs to, but it 'll help you get by," he said. "You can walk right down the middle of the street just like that and nobody will bother you."

"It seems kind of foolish, Sweeney," Shelby protested. "Surely they wouldn't send me to jail for smashing a guy like Osborne."

"Th' hell they wouldn't!" Sweeney said. "Why, I had a brother-in-law once that they sent to jail for less'n that. You take my tip and tote that stuff with you. In the mornin' you slip into them clothes till you see how the land lays. The paper 'll have a piece about all this. That mornin' paper prints every little item that comes along when it's about a rail. Where'll you spend the night?"

"I'll be darned if I know," Shelby said.

"Well, I tell you," Sweeney said. "You ride over to Dayton, the next station, you know. There's no night operator there. You can hoist a window and get in and roost there to-night. I'll drop you down all right."

"I don't believe I want to break any more laws, Sweeney," Shelby said. "What kind of country is it up beyond the tracks here?"

"Why, there's the stone quarry beyond us, don't you remember? There's a shanty there and it's never locked. You could go in there without breakin' no law. How'll that suit you?"

"It's the best I can do, I guess," Shelby said. "You'll keep still, Sweeney?"

"As a moonshiner. How're you fixed for coin?"

"I got a little."

Sweeney dug out a big wallet. It gave up a single ten-dollar bill.

"It's all I've got on me," Sweeney said. "If I had more you'd be welcome to it. You can send it back to me when you get it. Watchin' you put the wallop on that cuss Osborne was worth more. You don't get a chance to get in on a thing like that very much nowadays."

"Well, I'm much obliged, Sweeney," Shelby said. "I'll see you again before long, or write you. So-long."

"So-long, and good luck," said Sweeney.

Shelby dropped down from the caboose and walked up the road beyond the tracks. He found himself at the beginning of a woods and he sat down to wait for the meet order to be carried out.

He suddenly felt very lonely. He was a social animal, and at Boynton everybody had been his friend. It did not seem possible that he had become an outcast in a few hours.

He looked at his blue serge suit with a sigh. It was damp and wrinkled. The shine was gone from his tan shoes. As he rubbed his chin, he felt that the red stubble that he never permitted to show was well started. The rain hadn't done the near-Panama any good.

He was roused from these observations by the sight of a motor-car's headlight coming down the road. He watched it idly. It was coming fast, and it suddenly clanged its gong. The sound of that gong brought Shelby up with a start. It had a distinctive note.

The car came to the crossing and stopped. Shelby saw that the machine was a police-patrol. There was a uniformed man at the wheel, and another uniformed man stepped to the ground. He walked rapidly to the caboose and called out. Sweeney opened the door at once.

"Seen anything of a man in a blue suit and a straw hat down this way?" the policeman asked.

"Haven't seen a soul," Sweeney answered. "We just stopped here. I been inside."

"What're you waiting for?"

"A westbound freight," Sweeney said.

"Will it stop?"

"Nope. We'll swing 'em right ahead."

"When will there be another train?"

"Oh, not for a long time," Sweeney lied.

"Business is kind of light to-night. Probably won't be anybody stopping here again. This is only the quarry siding, you know. The despatcher stuck us in here because we're runnin' light. What's up, officer?"

"Oh, a little fuss up the street," the policeman answered.

He went back to the patrol-wagon and talked to his companion in tones too low to carry to Shelby. Shelby crouched back among the trees, afraid to make a move.

The westbound came along presently and the light pulled out. There was silence, save for the running motor. The policeman on the ground stood looking about him for a moment. Shelby felt that his eyes must find him there in the dark, but at last he climbed back to his seat. The man at the wheel turned the machine about and it sped back toward town.

Shelby took off his hat and wiped the sweat from the band. He could feel a trickle of it running down his spine. For half an hour he lay still, but no one came.

He turned then and walked back through the woods. In the shelter of the trees he took off his suit and collar and tie and donned the overalls and jumper. He rolled the near-Panama inside the suit and put on the cap. Then he dug a deep hole with his hands in the leaves and the soft loam and buried his bundle. With his dinner bucket in his hand he stole away through the woods, seeking only to put as great a distance as possible between himself and his pursuers.

He came presently to a field of stubble with a wire fence running along it. He climbed the fence and set out to follow it. He judged that he was headed straight west now. The fence ended at a road. This, he supposed, was the road which led to the company's offices. He crossed it and came to another field. He crossed several fields of stubble and one of shoulder-high corn, and came to another wood. He entered this and threw himself on the ground.

He was utterly weary, and as soon as he relaxed he fell asleep. When he awoke the sun was shining in the treetops. He sat up

and looked about him and then at his raiment. The jumper and overalls fit him a bit snugly, but the cap happened to be his own size. He felt he might pass for a laborer.

With a handful of loam he effaced one or two lingering, bright spots on the tan shoes and smudged his face, as Sweeney had directed. Then he left the woods. He saw that he had stopped just this side of a road. Making sure that no one was in sight, he stepped into it.

His watch showed six o'clock. He was desperately hungry and a little stiff, but he was more cheerful than he had been the night before. He determined to find a restaurant, have some breakfast, and then phone to Silent Simpson.

With this definite plan in his mind he set off down the road. In half an hour he came to the railroad, which was lined with factories here. As he neared the tracks the factory whistles began to blow for the change of shifts. Just ahead of him Shelby saw a sign: "Eat." As the night force began to pour from the factories he turned into the restaurant. He was ordering his breakfast at a rear table when several men came in.

He timed his meal so that he would finish with them. If he left the place when they did he would have at least more ease of manner. Possibly he would have more security.

A good appetite had always been his, and he ate heartily of the restaurant's plain but bountiful fare. The ache left his body and he grew quite cheerful.

He was of a mind now to make light of his experiences. Perhaps the best thing he could do would be to face the situation squarely and take whatever was coming to him. It was rather foolish to be masquerading in this way when all he had done was to punch a man who had lied about him. Of course they might send him to jail, but since he was jobless that would not be so bad as it might otherwise have been.

He finished his coffee, and with this idea in his mind pushed back his chair. As he was about to rise a newsboy came through the front door, calling the town's morning paper. Shelby beckoned to him and set-

tled into his chair again. He might as well see if the paper would enlighten him.

As the boy turned away from his table, leaving the folded paper lying on it, the waitress approached, check-pad in hand.

"That all, mister?" she asked.

"That's all," Shelby answered.

While she scribbled the amount of his bill he opened the paper. He did not know afterward just what he did, whether he cried out or whether he sat in dumb amazement.

The voice of the waitress came to him as if from afar:

"What's the matter, mister?"

He looked up stupidly. Her fresh, young face was bent toward his and her dark eyes were full of concern. She pushed a glass of water toward him.

"Better drink some of that," she said. "You look like you had seen a ghost. I thought you was goin' to faint dead away."

Shelby lifted the glass and sucked the water into a mouth suddenly gone as dry as dust.

"Lemme fill it again, good and cold," the girl said.

While Shelby gripped the edge of the table and summoned all his strength to his aid, she hurried to the water-cooler and refilled his glass. He drained it and said he was all right.

"You just set still and rest a minute," she said, and left him.

Shelby took up the paper with a hand that he forced to be steady. But he felt his vision blur again as the headline across the top of the front page leaped out at him:

E. AND W. DESPATCHER MURDERED

His eagerness for details cleared his sight and he ran his eyes over the story. It said that Thornton had been found dying in his room by the landlady. She had been away for a few minutes, and upon her return had heard him groaning. He had died without speaking. There had been a man to see him earlier in the evening—a man in a blue serge suit and a straw hat.

The woman had summoned the police. Officer Smith had responded to the call. The man in the blue suit had returned while Smith was talking to the woman. Smith

had sought to arrest him, but the man had fled, despite the fact that Smith had fired at him.

The city's entire police force was now seeking this man.

CHAPTER V.

THE COPIER AND THE GIRL.

HE felt for a moment as if he must put down the paper and abandon himself to the horror of his situation. But he knew that he must not do that. He must learn what there was to learn and then act to protect himself. As he sat there in the shabby restaurant he feared that any chance observer might recognize him as the man in blue. The disguise which Sweeney had provided him seemed thin enough.

So he set himself to read the story. There was a great deal of it. To Shelby it seemed as if no detail had been omitted. The reporters had learned of his connection with the wreck and of his fight with Thornton and Osborne. From a half-dozen paragraphs describing those events the story slipped into a minute description of the man in blue, as minute a description as it was possible to give from what the hysterical landlady had been able to tell. Shelby felt that the reporters might as well have proclaimed himself and the man in blue as one person. Unacquainted with laws of libel, he could not know that that had been the intention.

When he had finished his reading of the story he put down the paper. What should be his first move? Should he run away? That idea did not appeal to him. If he ran it would be taken as an evidence of his guilt. He would be a hunted man forever. But if he remained he would doubtless be arrested, convicted, and sentenced to the electric-chair.

Of course he had not killed Thornton, though he had threatened him. There had been no thought of murder in his heart at any time. He had not been in the house while the woman was away. But those were things which he alone knew. The facts were that he had come to Thornton's house, looking for Thornton. Thornton had not

been there then, but had been expected back shortly. The landlady had gone out. In her absence Thornton had returned. The assumption presumably was that he had killed Thornton then.

He had to prove that he had not been in the house—that he had not seen Thornton after their encounter in the superintendent's office. As that fact stood out, he caught his breath sharply. What about the girl—Sutherland's daughter? She would know that he had not been in the house. She had been there herself.

Had *she* killed Thornton? Had Thornton been in the house all the time she had been there, with the knowledge of the landlady or without it? He took up the paper again. A theory of how Thornton had been killed was of course advanced.

He had been shot to death with a revolver of small caliber. The coroner had easily established that. Just how had he been shot? The reporters drew a vivid pen-picture. Apparently Thornton had just come in. His umbrella, still damp, had been found in the hall below. He was wearing his rubbers. He had not removed his coat, though it was damp. His hat had lain near him as if it had dropped off when he had fallen.

That seemed to dispose of the question as to whether he had been in the house when Shelby inquired of him. But there were other entrances to the house. He might have come in by one of those while the landlady was out. Miss Sutherland would have been there.

Shelby remembered now that he had not noticed lights in the house. There might have been one in the parlor, back of drawn blinds. The girl might have sat waiting in the parlor. The door might have been closed. Thornton might have come in and gone up-stairs, unaware of her presence. She might have stolen after him and shot him.

He pictured her again as he had first encountered her. He recalled the hard hostility which had been in her manner as she had confronted him. She had seemed to lack the girlishness which her years would have given her. Certainly she was a girl of admirable poise.

"Gad!" said Shelby to himself. "If she had reason enough, she'd have nerve enough."

Again he took up the paper and went through the story, line by line. Nowhere was there any mention of Miss Sutherland. Indeed, a reporter had asked the landlady if Thornton had had any other callers that night, and the landlady had answered that he had had none. And yet the girl had admitted that she had gone to the house to see Thornton, adding that "something else" besides the wreck and the missing order had taken her there.

It was certainly very curious. He felt the urgent necessity of seeing Miss Sutherland at once. Remembering her gray eyes, he hesitated to draw her into the case till he had had a chance to talk to her. He smiled grimly as he reflected that he doubtless wouldn't draw any one into the case right away. He could not speak without betraying himself, and his notion just now was that he was going to fight to the limit to be free every minute.

The men from the factory had left the restaurant now, he discovered, and he put some change on top of the check the girl had left beside his plate and started for the door. He had almost gained the door when he saw the portly form of a policeman swing into view beyond the front window. The policeman was looking straight ahead, but Shelby turned and walked back to his table. The waitress was there.

"It's funny how giddy I feel," he said. "Wonder if I could have another drink?"

"Sure," the girl said.

She handed him a glass and he went to the cooler, and with his back to the window, drank slowly. Then he returned to the girl. The sight of the policeman had shocked him into a realization that he must hide himself more completely than he was now hidden. He must have another established identity. A name and a job were what he needed. His overalls and jumper had given him an idea.

"Any of these factories need men?" he asked.

"I'll say they do," the girl replied. "They're workin' night and day now. Can you run a machine?"

"Oh, no, I'm just a common laborer," he answered. "Come in from the country last week." He saw her eyes go to his clothing. "I been workin' in the street department," he hurried on. "Laid off this mornin'. Got to get something else."

"Well, all you got to do is to go over and get a job," she said.

"Thanks," he said.

Pulling his cap over his eyes and taking his bucket in his hand, he went into the street. The policeman was not in sight. Crossing the street he entered the yard of the nearest factory. A crew of men, mostly foreigners, were working in the yard. One man stood apart. Shelby judged him to be the foreman. He walked up to this man.

"Want any help?" he asked.

"Laborer?" the foreman asked.

Shelby nodded.

"Put up your bucket and take hold."

He congratulated himself on the amazing simplicity of the proceeding. This was the last place in the world the police would come seeking the man in blue, he was sure.

Before the day was done he was grateful for the muscles hardened by exercise. The work was arduous, and the foreman no easy taskmaster.

At noon Shelby had to go to the restaurant for his dinner, because there was none in the bucket. Nobody paid any attention to him.

That night he sought out one of the crew, an American, and asked to be taken to the man's boarding-house. The man said he was married himself, but he could tell him where to go. On the way to the house he spent Sweeney's ten dollars for a suit of clothes and a shirt. They were cheap and ill-fitting.

His room was a cubby-hole with one window, but as soon as he had finished his supper he went to it with the evening paper. There was a long story in this about Thornton's murder, but there were few new facts. The police still sought the man in blue. They had followed a number of clues, but they had not found the man.

Shelby rose and stood before the battered glass of his mirror. Certainly he did not at all resemble the trim brass-pounder

whom the police were seeking. The red stubble was thick on his face now, and the face seemed thinner and pale. He believed he could pass the police as he stood. At any rate, he decided to try. He would not risk his new suit yet.

Wrapping the dinner-bucket in a newspaper, he passed down the stairs. He gained the street without being seen. He walked swiftly down the street, and as soon as he came to the tracks he tore the paper from the bucket. With the bucket in his hand he felt more secure. It was his badge of respectability.

He crossed the tracks and came to a group of stores. One of them was a drug-store. He turned into it. The clerk behind the counter hardly glanced at him.

"Could I use your phone?" Shelby asked.

The clerk jerked his head in the direction of the booth. Shelby entered the booth and found Silent Simpson's number in the book. A moment later Simpson's voice came to him over the phone.

Shelby was not without his sense of drama and he waited for the exclamation of surprise which he expected from Simpson when he should disclose his identity.

"This is S. Understand?" he said.

"Yes," said Simpson quietly.

"You know who I mean?" Shelby asked, surprised by Simpson's lack of surprise.

"Yes. Where are you now?"

Shelby told him.

"There is a saloon two doors from where you are," Simpson said. "Go there. I'll be there in ten minutes."

Shelby left the drug-store and went into the saloon. There was a row of tables along the wall and he sat down at one of these. In ten minutes Simpson came through the door. Simpson went to the bar and ordered a bottle of beer. In the mirror back of the bar he encountered Shelby's gaze. He picked up the bottle of beer and carried it over to the table at which Shelby sat. He dropped into a chair across from Shelby.

"What were you and Ethel Sutherland talking about last night?" he asked in a low voice.

Shelby stared at him. He had expected a volley of questions about himself.

"How do you know I was talking to her?" he asked.

Simpson brushed the question aside with a big, impatient hand.

"I know you were," he said. "That's sufficient. I want to know what you talked about."

"I can't drag her into this thing, Silent," Shelby protested.

Simpson laughed shortly.

"Be as romantic as you like—when you're alone," he said. "I haven't time for that kind of thing. You're in a hole. The police are looking for you everywhere. You want to get out into the sunlight again, don't you?"

"You don't think I killed Thornton, do you, Silent?" Shelby demanded.

"If I thought you did I wouldn't be here talking to you," Simpson retorted. "I'd be hustling you off to jail. I'm a policeman. Now, come right through, my boy. I'm pretty busy. I waited at home till now for you to call me up."

"Have you asked Miss Sutherland what we talked about?"

"I haven't asked Miss Sutherland anything."

"I know you're busy, Silent, and I know you have no use for anything but facts, but I'll have to ask you to let me go slow," Shelby said. "How did you know I met Miss Sutherland? I—there may be a reason why I shouldn't talk about her."

"Oh, I know she was at Thornton's boarding-house last night," said Simpson. "I saw you and her get on the car."

"We talked about Thornton," Shelby said, and he repeated the conversation.

"Did she say where she was while she was inside that house?" Simpson asked.

"I didn't ask her."

"She didn't say whether she was in Thornton's room?"

"Certainly not."

"That's all I wanted to know," Simpson said, pushing back his chair.

"What do you want me to do, Silent?" Shelby asked.

"Oh, you seem to be doing all right by yourself," Simpson answered. "You might keep in touch with me. I expect you'd do that, anyway. That your dinner-pail?"

"Yes."

"Got a job?"

"Yes."

"I don't think the police will pick you up then. If they do, it won't matter much."

He rose and started for the door. Shelby felt a little of his old anger rise. Simpson didn't seem to care what happened to him. He rose and followed Simpson into the street. A car stood at the curb.

"Silent, do you know who killed Thornton?" he asked at Simpson's side.

"If I did," Simpson returned, "I'd have him in jail." He stood looking down at Shelby for a moment. When he spoke again, his voice was kinder. "Call me up in a day or so," he added.

He got into the car and drove off, leaving Shelby standing at the curb.

"They call you Silent," Shelby said bitterly. "I guess you're silent because you have nothing in your noodle to put into words. Here am I, hunted by the police, and you take it as a joke. Well, I'll just fight my own fight, you big stiff."

He felt himself harden again. His youth seemed very remote now. He felt like a man who has lived a long, embittered life. Through no fault of his own he had dropped from respectability to a criminal's position in the eyes of the law. And Silent Simpson didn't care a snap of his fingers.

With his shoulders squared and his eyes glowing defiance, he marched down the street. He passed one policeman and looked him in the eyes. The policeman's eyes slipped away carelessly.

"Anyway, he didn't suspect me," Shelby thought, and he gained confidence.

He meant to see Miss Sutherland at once. He had to start somewhere and it might as well be with her. He remembered, as he made his way toward the street they had stood on, that he did not know where she lived. She had fluttered away in the darkness. But she had said that her phone number was in her father's name.

He entered the inevitable drug-store and readily found her phone number and address. He had a notion to call her up, but changed his mind. She might not see him.

Clutching his precious dinner-bucket, he walked to her street. As he neared the cor-

ner he saw a man approaching from the other direction. He slowed his pace to see if the man was a policeman. As he passed under a light, the man proved to be in civilian dress. Shelby quickened his steps again. The man reached the corner just ahead of him.

As he came into full view, Shelby had to choke back an exclamation. The man was Osborne. He suffered a renewal of his red fury against Osborne then. If Osborne had not been a despicable liar, Shelby would not have been in his present predicament.

But he fought back his emotion. A supreme act of violence was already chalked up against him at police headquarters. He could commit no lesser acts.

As he controlled himself, Osborne passed down the street on which the girl lived. Shelby fell in behind him, twenty feet away. From beneath the down-drawn peak of his cap he saw Osborne turn and scrutinize him sharply. But his appearance seemed to satisfy the copier. He went on again.

He came presently to a house on the next corner. He turned in at this and ran up the steps. Shelby walked past and stopped in the shadow of a tree. Osborne rang the door-bell. There was a moment's pause. Then the door was opened. The light revealed Ethel Sutherland.

Shelby had feared that she would come to the door. The moment Osborne had turned at the corner Shelby had had a prevision that her home was his destination.

As Osborne entered the house, Shelby leaned back against the tree. He was sickened. He was a boy out of his own home only a year, and in that year he had been welcomed in many pleasant homes. The sight of the girl standing there with the light falling on her brown hair and with her eyes fixed on Osborne's face made his heart ache with longing. He wished he might have gone up those steps and have been received by this girl, as she might possibly have received him, if they had not been caught in this net.

And then suspicion of her flared up in him. Why was Osborne going to see her? She had gone to see Thornton. Thornton had been Osborne's friend. And now, in spite of what she had said about Thornton,

Osborne was her guest. She seemed to have lied. Probably she had been "stringing" him.

He straightened up from the tree and stood listening intently. There was hardly a sound in the street. No one was in sight along its length, so far as he could make out.

Walking along the line of trees on the soft turf, he came to the side of the house. From his position he could look through a window.

Osborne seemed to be preparing to leave. He was standing with his hat in his hand. The girl was standing across from him, leaning on the back of a chair. The chair was thus between them.

Shelby saw that the girl's head was thrown back. Her gray eyes were alight and there was a smile on her lips. The smile made Shelby shiver. It was a hard and bitter smile.

Osborne was smiling, too, evilly. Shelby wondered what they had been talking about to bring those expressions to their faces. He could see Osborne's lips move. The girl shook her head.

Expecting Osborne to move toward the door at any moment, Shelby prepared to go back to the street. Before he could move, a heavy hand was laid on his shoulder. Instinctively he struggled to free himself, but he could not shake off that grip.

He looked around, sure he was in the hands of a policeman. But the man who held him was Silent Simpson. There was a grim smile on Simpson's lips.

"Lord, how you scared me, Silent," Shelby said. "What do you want?"

"I did want you to shinny on your own side," Simpson said, "but since you won't I want you to do a little work for me. Come out here."

They walked out into the deep shadow which the trees made.

"As soon as Osborne leaves, go in and see Miss Sutherland," Simpson said. "Find out all you can about what she and Osborne have said. Call me up when you leave her. If I'm not at home, call me first thing in the morning."

"Suppose she tells me something in confidence?" Shelby said.

"Oh, I guess you could repeat to me anything she told you," Simpson replied.

"If I gave her my word that I wouldn't betray her I'd have to keep it, Silent," said Shelby.

"Suppose I turned you over to the police right now?"

Shelby stood looking at him. Then he sighed heavily.

"I guess you'd have to do it, Silent," he said. "I couldn't throw down a girl who trusted me, no matter what she had done."

A little gleam came in Silent Simpson's eyes.

"You can't forget those gray eyes, can you?" he asked.

"Me?" Shelby said. "Why, Silent, this is the second time I've seen Miss Sutherland in my life."

"Gosh!" Simpson said. "You *are* young, aren't you? Well, here comes Osborne. Run along in there after I'm gone and see what you can find out. I'm going after Osborne. Call me up to-night. If you don't get me, call me in the morning. Can you do that much?"

"I'll do that much," Shelby promised.

CHAPTER VI.

SILENT SIMPSON.

OSBORNE came out and started up the street. Simpson followed him discreetly. Shelby was left alone under the trees.

He tried to think logically, but his brain was bewildered. He felt his own immediate need of aid, but he could not understand the actions of the other folks in the drama. Indeed, their drama seemed not to be his at all. It seemed to him then as if they had only come into contact by accident.

By going in to see the girl, at Simpson's request, he could not discover how he would be serving himself. Simpson was investigating something, but it was nothing which had to do with the plight in which Shelby found himself. It was something which antedated the murder of Thornton. It was something, in fact, which antedated the wreck, and therefore it was something which antedated all of Shelby's troubles. It

reached back to the far time when Shelby had been a contented young brass-pounder at Boynton.

But he had told Simpson he would go in to see the girl, and to say the least he was not averse to seeing her again. So he went up and rang the bell.

It was a frankly puzzled young lady who confronted him across the threshold when she opened the door. The gray eyes widened in surprise and then they ran up and down the denim-clad figure.

"Yes?" she said, and she was as remote at that moment as Shelby's past life.

"I'm Shelby," Shelby announced.

"My good gracious!" the girl exclaimed. "What has happened to you? What are you doing dressed like that?"

"Keeping out of the clutches of the police mostly," Shelby said with a quick glance over his shoulder for fear one of the minions of the law might be lurking in the dark back there.

"Oh, yes," the girl said. "Come in quickly before any one sees you."

He entered the hall, and she preceded him into a sitting-room off it. She took his cap and reached for his dinner-bucket. He surrendered it, and their eyes met. Hers were brimming with laughter.

"It's no joke," Shelby said with a touch of sullenness in his voice.

He had a renewed sense that nobody cared a hang about him and his troubles. Silent Simpson was not interested and the girl was amused.

But she quickly sobered, and her eyes softened as she fixed them on his face. Her gaze had the effect of wine in young Shelby's blood. He had not fully realized how lonely he had been.

"You must have had a terrible time," she said. "Sit down and tell me about it."

He sat down and poured out his tale of woe. She was not amused again. When he finished she was wide-eyed.

"I think you have been very resourceful—you and your Mr. Sweeney," she said. "You haven't told any one that I was at Mr. Thornton's house that night, have you?"

"Not a soul," he answered. "But Silent Simpson knows you were there."

"He does?" she whispered.

"He was watching that house, too, apparently. He told me he knew I was innocent of the murder because he had seen you and me get on the car."

"Did he say why he was watching the house? Did he seem to know why I was there?"

"If he knew he didn't tell me," Shelby replied. "He hasn't told me anything, in fact. He's looking up something on his own hook. He doesn't care what happens to me."

"Oh, yes, he does," she said. "But when Silent is investigating something, it's hard to interest him in anything else. Don't you see that he will be able to aid you when the time comes?"

"When he gets good and ready," Shelby said. "Well, he told me to come in here and find out what you and Osborne had been talking about. I'm not here to spy on you. If you want to tell me anything that I can repeat to him, I'll do it. If you don't, of course I can't."

"There is nothing I will tell you," she said. "Mr. Osborne came to see me on a matter that we had discussed many times before Mr. Thornton was killed. It has nothing to do with that."

"I suppose he wanted to marry you," Shelby said.

The girl's ready color flooded into her face.

"Why should you suppose that?" she asked.

"He naturally would," said Shelby.

He was not trying to flirt with the girl or be flippant with her. He was too tired in mind and body to attempt that. He was so tired that he was ready to speak almost anything that came into his mind. The girl seemed to sense that.

"You're pretty well worn out, aren't you?" she asked. "It must be very unpleasant to be hunted by the police."

"It's a time when a man needs a friend," Shelby said glumly.

The girl sat looking at him for several minutes. Her eyes were speculative. At last she said:

"I need a friend myself, Mr. Shelby. I need some one to help me. I had been

thinking about you to-night and wishing you were free. I wondered what had become of you. I had read the papers of course."

Shelby cheered up appreciably. To have been thought about and wondered about was a good deal just now. He edged forward on his chair and his eyes brightened.

"Oh, I've been down in the mouth," he said. "Never mind about me, Miss Sutherland. If I can help you in any way, just tell me how and I'll go to it."

"Wait just a minute," she said.

She left the room, but returned almost at once. She held a folded letter in her hand.

"This is the letter you received, supposedly from Thornton," she said. "I wish you'd look at it again and tell me if you find anything out of the ordinary about it."

Shelby took the piece of paper. The girl sat down near him. He studied the writing word by word. At last he shook his head.

"It looks like any ordinary typewritten message to me," he said.

"And so it is, with one exception," the girl said.

She rose and came to his side and bent over his shoulder as he held the paper. Shelby could feel her breath on his cheek. She pointed a slim forefinger at the writing on the paper. Shelby watched her hand with fascinated eyes. He wondered what she would do if he should suddenly take it in his.

"Do you see that the typewriter on which this was written has no period?" she said. "All the periods have been filled in with pen and ink."

Looking closely at the periods Shelby could see that this was true. They had been carefully made, but the difference was discernible, especially so with the period after Thornton's typewritten name. There was the minutest blur of ink there.

"I see it," Shelby said. "What about it, Miss Sutherland? Is it important?"

"It is of the utmost importance—to me," the girl said, and she went back to her chair and sat down.

"You'd like to know whose typewriter this was written on?" Shelby asked.

"I would, indeed."

Shelby rumbled his red hair.

"Well, I never used a mill myself," he said. "Never had any occasion to yet. How would a fellow go about finding this particular machine?"

"Would you attempt to find it if I suggested how?" she asked.

He looked at her. Her eyes were limpid now, rather appealing.

"You bet I would," Shelby said.

"I think that machine belongs to Mr. Osborne," she said.

"To Osborne? You think he wrote this note?"

"Well, I haven't gone that far," she said. "You know Mr. Thornton was away from his boarding-house the evening you and I called there. He might have been at Osborne's rooms. He might have used Osborne's typewriter."

She leaned forward and cupped her chin in one hand, a wholly engaging attitude. She was looking at him, but her concentration of thought made her regard remote. Shelby was able to look straight into her eyes without her seeming to notice it.

"I have been studying this message ever since you gave it to me," she said. "I have been greatly puzzled by it. I know that Mr. Thornton had not used a typewriter in years. He had no occasion to. In fact, I don't believe he ever used a machine in his work. He came to the despatcher's office from an O.S. office."

"But I know that Osborne used a machine. Before he became copier he worked one of the way wires in the despatcher's office. Times when I was up there to see father I've seen him copying messages on the typewriter. Then when he went to copying he didn't need the machine, of course. I don't know whether the machine was his own or not, but I imagine it was. I've tried to recall seeing it in the office after he left that wire, and I can't. I have only a recollection of a new operator working with a pen. My notion is that Osborne took his machine to his room when he had no use for it at the office."

"And you want me to see if it is in his room now, and if the period is gone from it?" Shelby asked.

She raised her head. Her eyes glowed.

"That's it, exactly," she said. "As I remember the machine Osborne used, it was rather disreputable. I imagine it had seen a good deal of service. If that were so, any of the letters might be missing from it now, mightn't they?"

Shelby stood up. She rose also. Shelby's head was flung back. His eyes were bright. He had a feeling that he was being tossed to the lions, but he was willing if he could serve the girl. He had looked at the changing lights in the Irish gray eyes too long.

At the bottom of his heart he felt that the girl was asking a good deal. She seemed to be thinking only of herself. She must realize, as well as he realized, that his hunt for this typewriter would be fraught with peril to himself. A policeman would be likely to nab him any minute.

But then a knight usually had to buck a pretty stiff game. The comfort was that he usually came through.

"Where does Osborne live?" he asked.

"You go down to the car line, cross that, and go two blocks beyond it," she answered. "Osborne lives in the first house from the corner on the north side. It's a white house with a flat roof. You can't miss it."

"If I learn anything, what shall I do?" Shelby asked.

"Oh, come back," she said. "I will wait up for you. Mother is just in the next room."

"All right," Shelby said.

She went to the door with him. He opened it and half turned to her. She held out her hand. He took it and pressed it. It was a warm, soft hand. She looked at him, and he beheld, really for the first time, the light that lies in a woman's eyes—and sometimes lies and lies.

Anyhow, he was all fussed up when he got out into the street. Instead of engaging himself with his problem, he wondered whether she had been merely grateful or whether she liked him for himself alone.

He was within half a dozen houses of Osborne's before he began to wonder how he was going to get a glimpse of the typewriter if it really was in Osborne's room,

He considered rapping on the door and asking if Osborne were at home. But he perceived quickly that that wouldn't do. If Osborne were at home he couldn't face him. If he were not, whoever answered the door would tell Osborne about his caller when Osborne came in. In any event, Osborne's suspicions would be roused.

He saw that there was a vacant lot across the street from the house, and he went over there. Osborne's house, being on the corner, was in the light from the street lamp. Screened by the trees, Shelby studied it.

He saw that there was a side entrance with a roofed-over porch. Above the roof there was a window, and in the window a sliding screen.

"It 'd be a cinch to get in there," Shelby told himself. "I could shin one of those posts like a wheat. But just supposing a cop should happen along!"

For a while he balanced the hazard against the girl's regard. If he returned to her and told her he had lost his nerve, those gray eyes would fill with scorn. For her own purpose she had had nerve enough to go to Thornton's boarding-house and wait for him there alone. She wouldn't have much use for a coward. And she must have a very good reason for wanting to know about that typewriter.

When he at last decided to enter the house he realized that he had merely been losing time by debating with himself. He knew now that he would have tried to gain an entrance if the house had been surrounded by brass-buttoned cops.

At the corner he stood and listened for a moment, and then he darted across the brief lawn and came to the porch. Again he listened. Silence was all about him.

He shinned up one of the posts and climbed to the porch roof. Slipping out the screen, he stepped into a hallway and replaced the screen.

"Holy smokes," he breathed. "Suppose somebody finds me."

His heart was leaping at his dry throat. His body was bathed in clammy sweat, and shook like the far-famed trembling poplar.

But he had to get busy or go back, and while he wished himself well out of the situation, he was not ready to go back.

"I'm a darned fool, but here I go," he said.

The hall in which he stood was short. Across from him was the opened door of a bathroom. At his left was a closed door. Beyond the bathroom door was another closed door and beyond that a door partly open.

He was in a dilemma. A person going to bed on this still, warm night would probably leave his door open. On the other hand, some one might lately have quitted that room and left the door ajar. In the latter contingency that was the room to explore; in the former it was the room to be left severely alone. In fact, if there was any one in that room he had better slide down the post and get away.

Well, he had to have a look, since he had come this far. He tiptoed to the door. There was not the slightest sound from within. He pushed the door farther ajar. Still no sound.

He entered the room. In the dim light from without he could see at once that it was a man's room. There was a pipe on the dresser at his elbow. A man's coat hung on a chair.

His eyes swept the room, and then in spite of himself he uttered an exclamation of satisfaction. On a table in the corner stood a typewriter with a rubber cover over it. He could see the frame below the cover.

He advanced swiftly to the machine and laid his hand on the cover to remove it. But he did not remove it. Instead he stood rooted to the spot.

Down-stairs there had been a whirring noise. Shelby recognized it. In his ears it sounded loud. Some one was ringing the front door bell.

"My God!" he breathed in acute terror.

There was a step below stairs and the sound of the front door being opened.

"Good evening," said a man's deep voice.

"Good evening," a woman returned.

"My name is Simpson," the voice went on. "I am chief of police of the E. and W. Railroad. I believe one of our men boards here—Mr. Osborne."

"Oh, yes," the woman said. "But he isn't at home now. He usually goes out

in the evening. He is due at work in the course of the next hour or so."

"I know that," Simpson said. "I didn't expect to find him here. I wanted to go up to his room for a moment, if I might."

"Well—" The woman's voice trailed into silence on the word. She seemed not to know what to say.

"I am going up to his room to look through some papers he has," Simpson went on, and there was a new note of firmness in his voice. "I am an officer of the law. Osborne is in the company's employ. The company wishes to ascertain certain things about him. I don't want Osborne or any one else to know that I have been here. You will understand that? You will understand that you are to say nothing to any one about my visit."

"Very well, sir," the woman said.

She was apparently overawed by Simpson's majestic manner. Shelby heard the door close.

"You can go up," the woman said. "It's the last room to your left. I hope this is all right, sir."

"It's perfectly all right," Simpson said. "You needn't worry. Don't concern yourself about it at all. I won't be long."

Meantime, Shelby had stood with his hand on the typewriter cover, too frightened and bewildered to move. But he perceived that he must hide himself from Simpson. Escape by the hall and the window was impossible. He would not have time to get the screen out.

His eyes swept the room. There was a door beyond the typewriter stand. He opened this and pushed inside. He felt about and found he had entered a closet. It was hung about with Osborne's clothing and there was a trunk in it.

Shelby pushed the door shut till it was open only an inch. Then he sank down on the trunk. His heart was hammering worse than ever and the closet was close. He felt as if his breathing must be heard all over the house.

Silent Simpson's footsteps were on the stairs. He gained the landing, came along the hall, and entered the room. Shelby heard a switch click and there was light beyond the crack of the door.

Then there was complete silence, save for Shelby's breathing. He almost held his breath to check the sound. He could imagine the big man standing out there, scrutinizing the objects in the room with his calm, deliberate eyes.

Shelby thought he would never stir. He was filled with apprehensions lest Simpson come to the closet. There was nothing he could tell Simpson, because he was enlisted in the girl's behalf. Simpson would probably tote him off to a police station. Simpson didn't let other people nose in where he himself was nosing.

At last Simpson moved. There was the sound of drawers being opened. Shelby supposed that Simpson was going through the dresser. He finished that and moved across the room. He was coming directly toward the closet door. Shelby hunched himself down on the trunk. But Simpson did not open the door.

He seemed to be pausing beside the typewriter. Apparently he removed the cover, for Shelby heard the click of a key. Again Simpson moved away from the—door.

There was a sound now as if a lid had been dropped down. Shelby recalled that he had seen a desk in one corner of the room, a trifling thing of a kind used by women more than by men. Then there was the creak of a chair. There was another sound, which Shelby could not determine the nature of. Then followed a splintering of light wood.

A moment's silence came after this, and then papers rustled. After that ceased, there was a lasting silence, broken only by an intermittent whisper of sound as if Simpson were fingering a sheet of paper. Shelby supposed he was reading something.

"H-m," said Silent Simpson, after what to Shelby seemed an unending time. There was infinite satisfaction in that exhalation.

CHAPTER VII.

A BIT OF THIEVERY.

SHELBY heard Simpson rise and put up the flap of the desk. Then Simpson moved about the room. As he neared the door of the closet, Shelby

was ready to abandon hope. He felt as if he must yell at Simpson either to open the closet door or to get out of the room.

Simpson obligingly took the latter course. He stood two feet from the door for a moment, and then Shelby heard him leave and go down the stairs.

Apparently the woman had lain in wait for him.

"Did you get what you wanted, sir?" Shelby heard her say.

"I completed my search," said Simpson, as a detective should.

"Well, I hope there won't be any trouble about this," she said.

"There will be no trouble," Simpson returned, "and I hope that you will bear in mind that you are not to mention my visit. If Osborne asks any questions, tell him you know nothing about a visitor to his rooms."

"Yes, sir," she agreed. "I understand."

Shelby heard the front door opened and closed. For some time there was no sound from below stairs. Shelby began to think the woman had gone to bed, and got ready to escape from the house.

But he had not reckoned with feminine curiosity. If he had been more experienced he would have known that sleep would not come to the woman till she had investigated what Simpson had been doing in Osborne's room.

Shelby had risen from the trunk and had his hand on the door-knob when he heard her mounting the stairs on soft-shod feet. She came almost soundlessly along the hall and stepped into the room.

"It is all off," Shelby told himself. "Here's where a lady discovers a burglar."

As the woman stood within the hall door for a moment, evidently looking about, Shelby backed to the wall and hid behind an overcoat that was hanging there. He heard the woman utter an exclamation and move across the room. She let down the flap of the desk.

"Of all things," she said. "He pried that drawer open. I wonder if he was a burglar?"

Shelby heard the rustle of papers and knew that she was satisfying her curiosity by going through the papers which Simp-

son had lately examined. Then the flap of the desk was closed again.

She seemed to have a moment of indecision, and then she crossed the room and her hand fell on the knob of the closet door. She pushed the door open gingerly, and Shelby supposed she was peering inside. He didn't see how she missed seeing his feet beneath the long overcoat.

But the woman appeared not to be too inquisitive about the closet. It was dark in there, and she was already nervous. She had looked inside more as a matter of duty than as a matter of curiosity. She suddenly closed the door.

Shelby heard her swish across the room and go into the hall. He opened the door and more clearly heard her descend the stairs. Down there a door was slammed loudly and Shelby thought he heard a key turned in the lock, though he could not be sure.

He had had enough of hiding, however, and he emerged from the closet. The room was again in darkness, the woman having clicked off the light as she passed into the hall.

Shelby tiptoed over to the desk in the corner and softly let down the flap. In the center of the desk there was a small drawer. Shelby opened it. He saw that there were slight marks on it near the lock. Simpson, he understood then, had forced the light lock open with his pocket-knife. The sound which Shelby had not been able to determine the nature of had been the opening of the knife. He had seen that knife in Simpson's hands in the past. It was half a foot long, with large and heavy blade.

There were papers in the drawer, but Shelby did not look at them. He closed the desk and stood looking about the room in the half light. He felt secure from interruption now, and he was intensely curious to know why Silent Simpson had visited this room and what he had been looking for.

What were the two different courses which the girl and Silent were following? Would there be a confluence of them? And if there was, how would it involve Osborne? The first-trick man had hinted

that Osborne was not altogether on the square. The attitude of the girl and of Simpson seemed to confirm that.

If Osborne were going to be accused of something, he might be made to confess, under stress, what he knew about the disputed order. If he told the truth, Shelby would be freed of the guilt of that. And Simpson did not believe he had killed Thornton. Simpson never talked idly.

Shelby felt more hopeful, standing there in Osborne's room in the still night, than he had felt since he had read those flaring head-lines in the newspapers.

Simpson, he supposed, would be the more kindly disposed toward him if he could help Simpson, and he determined to see if he couldn't find something among Osborne's effects which would lead to that mental attitude on Silent's part. He went back to the closet.

For a man with a copier's salary, Osborne had an ample wardrobe, and Shelby methodically went through his clothing. He found nothing till he came at length to the last pair of trousers, neatly suspended from their hangers. He thrust his hand into one of the pockets and drew forth a ring with half a dozen keys on it.

He was about to return these when he saw one short key which he knew would fit a trunk. He tried it in the lock of the trunk at his feet, and the lock turned. He lifted the lid.

The trunk was only half filled with various articles of clothing. He tossed these out. Groping, his hand came into contact with a small, paper-wrapped bundle. He drew it out and took it to the door. The removed wrapping disclosed a pair of strong pliers. Scarcely knowing why he did so, Shelby slipped these into his pocket. Then he went back to the trunk and groped again.

This time he brought forth an oblong box. He carried it to the door and opened it. For a long time, motionless, breathing heavily, he stood looking down at the box. Then he put it into his pocket with the pliers. Then he returned the clothing to the trunk, locked the trunk, and returned the keys to Osborne's pocket.

He went into the bedroom again. He

listened for a moment, but there was not a sound in the house. He tiptoed into the hall.

By the dim light from the screened window he saw that his watch marked five minutes past eleven. He seemed safe enough now. The woman doubtless would not have again ventured above stairs for a small fortune. Osborne had been on duty in the despatcher's office for five minutes.

Shelby took out the screen and left the window open. Then he leaned out and used his eyes and ears for five tense minutes. Except for a soft night-sighing, there was no sound out there.

He withdrew his head and went back to Osborne's room. He lifted the typewriter. It was heavy enough and an awkward thing to handle. But Shelby tucked it under his arm and went back to the window. Of course, this was robbery, but hadn't Silent Simpson, a man of the law himself, set an example? Simpson had not only taken something from Osborne's room, but he had forcibly entered Osborne's desk.

Shelby set the typewriter out on the almost flat roof. He stepped out himself and replaced the screen. Then, with the typewriter under one arm, he managed to wriggle down the post to the ground. The porch cast a shadow, and he stood in this while he mopped sweat from his face.

With the typewriter again under his arm, he went to the street. He had to hunch his hip under the machine to carry it comfortably, and so he made his progress to the street on which the car line ran. He was about to step into the light of this when he saw a policeman directly across the street. He almost dropped the machine.

The policeman stood on the corner for a moment, looking up and down. Then he crossed the street toward Shelby. Shelby dodged behind a tree. The policeman came to this side, stood for another moment, and then set off down the main thoroughfare at a leisurely pace. Shelby waited till the sound of his footsteps died in the distance. Then he had to put down the machine to wipe the sweat from his face again.

"Gee," he told himself, "if this thing

keeps up much longer, I'll be a candidate for a permanent place in a padded cell."

Still toting the typewriter, he crossed the street and came to the friendly darkness of the street on which the girl lived. He hurried along this and presently stood at her front door. He pushed the electric button. Almost at once she appeared in the hall and opened the door.

"Come in," she said.

Shelby stooped and picked up the typewriter. The girl stared at it, but made no comment. She preceded him into the sitting-room.

"Is it the machine?" she asked.

Shelby put the machine down on the table and pulled off the rubber cover.

"It's the machine," he answered, with a touch of pride in his manner.

The girl lifted the carriage, pushed back the ribbon, and pressed the period so that the letter came to the top.

"And the period is gone," she said.

"Oh, I knew it! How did you get it, Mr. Shelby?"

Shelby told his story with due impressiveness, while she sat across from him, wide-eyed with wonder.

"And so Simpson was there?" the girl said. "I wonder what he was looking for?"

Shelby glanced at her quickly. His wits had been a good deal sharpened by his experiences.

"I guess you know, don't you?" he asked.

The girl flushed. The gray eyes were veiled for a moment. Shelby leaned to her.

"Look here, Miss Sutherland," he said, "I don't deny that I would do anything for you. You're a nice, pretty girl. But is it quite fair to keep me in the dark? A few minutes ago I was within five feet of a policeman. If he had seen me, where would I be now? I'm running a great risk to be seen on the street at all. Can't you tell me what this is all about?"

The veil was lifted from the gray eyes. They were sad and wistful now.

"I can't tell you," she said. "I shall never be able to tell you. But I think that in the end what you did to-night will serve you as well as it serves me."

"I've a notion it will myself," Shelby said.

"Did you find something else?" she asked. "Something that concerned you?"

"I don't know yet," Shelby said. "May I call up Simpson on your phone?"

"You won't tell him you are here?"

"He knows I came in here a while ago. What difference would it make?"

"He would wonder that you had been here so long. Please don't tell him you are."

"Very well," Shelby said.

He went into the hall and called Simpson's number. A woman answered the phone after a long wait. She said Simpson was not at home, and she didn't know when he would be.

The girl had come to the hall door and had stood there while he waited.

"What shall you do now?" she asked.

"I'm going back to my boarding-house and get some rest," Shelby answered. "Simpson said if he wasn't home to-night to call him in the morning. I want to be ready to do that first thing."

He went to the door. She followed him. He turned, as he had turned before. Again she put out her hand. He took it and kept it.

"You know I thank you, don't you?" she asked in a low voice.

"You don't need to thank me," Shelby mumbled.

They stood a moment, hand in hand, searching each other's eyes in their first real appraisal. Shelby's regard was so intent that her color broke into her face and she drew away her hand.

"Oh," she said, "you're forgetting your dinner-pail."

She went into the sitting-room and returned with the bucket.

Shelby took it with a laugh.

"If any cop sees me now, he'll think I've been working overtime," he said.

The girl laughed, too, her eyes bright.

Shelby opened the door.

"Whatever you do, you'll be careful, won't you?" she asked.

"I'll be careful," Shelby said, and he went through the door. In the street he walked slowly for a minute. "Great

guns!" he told himself. "I'd like to know her when she had nothing on her mind to trouble her. I bet she'd be a jolly pal."

On his way to his boarding-house he met no one. As he came to the railroad tracks a freight-train whistled. He stood watching it till it had passed.

"Gee," he said, "I'm homesick for that stuff—mighty homesick! Won't I be glad when this thing is straightened out and I get a chance to pound the old key again?"

He walked slowly along till he reached the boarding-house. There was a rickety fence in front of the house with a sagging gate set into it. A rope had been looped over a picket in the gate and one in the fence. As Shelby was lifting this rope to open the gate he heard the sound of an automobile approaching. In a moment its light came into view. It was running fast.

Shelby pulled up the rope quickly, threw open the gate, and entered the yard. The automobile was near. He saw that its light might pick him out if he mounted the steps. He dodged around to the side of the house. There was a barrel here set under a waterspout, and he crouched behind the barrel.

He was astonished when the car stopped out in front. There were footsteps on the pavement and then on the sidewalk. He had left the gate open and some one passed through it. He mounted the steps.

There was a sharp rapping on the old door. The echo rang in the bare hall beyond. The rapping was repeated several times. Then footsteps sounded behind the door, and it was opened.

"How do, ma'am?" said a heavy voice. "I'm from the Second Precinct. Have you taken any new boarders lately?"

A moment's silence followed the question. Shelby could imagine his fat and stolid landlady eying the policeman with suspicion before she answered. He had a notion that she would not be very friendly toward policemen who came prowling in the night.

"No, I haven't taken no new boarders," she said tartly. "The house is full—has been full for 'most a year now. All reg'lar boarders, workin' in the factories. What is it ye're lookin' for?"

Shelby could hear the cop shift from one foot to the other.

"Hey, you," he then called, "come 'ere a minute!"

Some one came across the pavement and the walk, as the policeman had come.

"We're lookin' for the man that was mixed up in the murder of the despatcher on the railroad," the policeman said. "This man give us a tip that he had seen the man to-night. He was in disguise as a working man. Carried a dinner-bucket. This man didn't tumble to who he was till just a bit ago when he was settin' up in his office workin' his reg'lar trick. Then it all come back to him that the man he had met and the man we're lookin' for was one and the same. You know most that come to this neighborhood, I have no doubt, ma'am, and belike you have seen this lad. Tell her, man, what he was like."

Osborne's voice followed.

"He was dressed in overalls and jumper. He carried a dinner-bucket. He has red hair and a red beard starting now. He's as homely as a mud fence. Got a kind of a flat face with brown eyes and a snub nose. About twenty-two years old. A square-shouldered, husky-looking fellow, but not above medium height."

"I have not seen him nor nobody that looks like him at all," the woman said.

"Well, that's all," the policeman said regretfully. "The sergeant got a hunch that this lad, bein' dressed like an honest working man, would hide in the factory district. We was just lookin' around. We been lookin' other places, but we ain't found nobody that resembles him yet. Sorry to rout you out, ma'am."

The woman made no reply. She merely closed the door in their faces. Shelby heard them return to the machine. It sped away down the street.

Shelby came from behind his barrel. He waited till the machine crossed the tracks. Then he went up and rapped on the door. Plainly the woman had no use for cops. Whether she would be friendly to one whom cops hunted remained to be seen. Shelby determined to find out.

She opened the door in a minute. At sight of him she reached forth a large, hard

hand and clutched him by the sleeve and drew him into the hall.

"Make no noise," she said. "The police are after you."

"I know it," Shelby said. "I was hiding behind the rain-barrel while they were at the door. I want to change my clothes and get out of here."

"It would be best," the woman agreed. "They may come back when they don't find you elsewhere and search the house. They would go tramping through an honest woman's house without so much as a by-er-leave. You are not safe in this district. Th' rummies! Did they think I'd tell them anything? They took my husband to the police station one Saturday night when he was feelin' good, and there they let him lie till Monday mornin'. He got pneumony and died. I hate them all."

"Boy, you seem like a nice lad. If I can help you escape them hounds, I will. The one man spoke of your red beard. I'll get you a razor. You had better shave it off. Get into other clothes. Leave your bucket here. You will be all right. Them cops haven't sense enough to look for two kinds of people at one time."

Twenty minutes later, aided by this hater of the law, Shelby stole from the house and walked down the street.

"Keep your eye peeled for cops," had been the woman's parting admonition.

Shelby was keeping his eye peeled.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE WEAVING BEGINS.

BUT he met no one. Not even a sauntering policeman was in his way. When he reached Simpson's house he found it dark. He went up and rang the bell. Simpson came down the stairs at once. He threw open the door without preliminary question.

"Come in, Shelby," he said, with one glance at the latter. "My wife told me you called me up."

Shelby followed him into his den, a small room at the lower end of the hall. It was a severe room with only one table, two chairs, a couch, and a bookcase in it.

"I was lying down to catch a few winks," Simpson said. "What's on your mind? What 're you sweating about?"

"What did you find in Osborne's room, Silent?" Shelby asked, as he sat down.

Simpson gave no start of surprise. His eyes narrowed a little, but that was the only sign from him.

"You followed me there, did you?" he asked.

"I didn't," Shelby denied. "But I know you opened Osborne's desk."

"Very well," Simpson said. "Let's have no mystery about it. I'm not going to tell you what I found there. What else?"

Shelby drew the pliers and the oblong box from his pocket. He rose from the chair and placed them on the table.

"Have a look at those, Silent," he said.

Simpson glanced at the pliers without picking them up. He did pick up the oblong box and removed the cover.

"Where did you get this stuff?" he asked.

"In Osborne's room," Shelby answered.

Simpson stared down at the little box in the palm of his hand. Then he looked up at Shelby.

"Just tell me the whole story," he said.

Shelby went over the events of the night thus far. Simpson sat motionless, looking at him.

"Why didn't you come out of your hiding-place while I was in Osborne's room?" he asked when Shelby had finished.

"I was afraid," Shelby answered. "I thought you'd be sore."

"I might have been," Simpson said. "I don't quite understand about Osborne's being with the policeman. I followed him to the office when he left Miss Sutherland's and he got ready to go to work. Just a minute."

He took a telephone from the table and called the despatcher's office. He asked if Osborne were in the office.

"No," he said when he had got an answer, "I don't want to talk to him. Don't tell him I called up."

"Osborne is in the office now," he said. "He said he was feeling a little off-color along about eleven fifteen and went out for a walk. That dovetails with your story. Wait till I get dressed, Shelby."

He left the room. Shelby felt that he had become more than a lay figure in the drama in Simpson's estimation. The big man had come out of his shell so far as he was concerned. He seemed kinder, more human. Shelby understood that Simpson had been concentrating on something that excluded an interest in Shelby's troubles. Now the thing which Simpson had been looking into and the accusation against Shelby were becoming merged in a well-rounded whole. Simpson's perspective had been considerably enlarged. Simpson admired men who did things, who got results. Shelby knew that he had won the detective's regard. He had become Simpson's ally, his only one in this case, doubtless, and in so becoming he had insured his own safety.

Simpson was back in five minutes, fully dressed. He opened the table drawer and took out two revolvers.

"Ever use a gun?" he asked Shelby.

"No," Shelby had to confess.

Simpson put one of the revolvers in his pocket and the other back in the drawer.

"You're better unarmed if you can't use a gun," he said. "Come along."

Shelby was wise enough to ask no questions. They went to the garage in the rear of the house.

"Where'd you get the new duds?" Simpson asked. "They're not as becoming as that nifty blue suit you had."

"A friend lent me ten dollars," Shelby said. "I put it into this outfit."

"I offered you money," Simpson said dryly.

"I didn't think I'd need it," Shelby said.

Simpson ran out his little car, and Shelby got in. He was quite happy now. Simpson had so far loosened up as to ask a question not pertinent to the business in hand. Silent Simpson couldn't give more evidence of interested friendship than that.

Simpson ran the car half a dozen blocks. He stopped before a modest house on a side street.

"We'll go in here," he said.

They went up the steps, and Simpson's ring finally brought a white-haired man to the door. He peered up at Simpson from old eyes.

"It's Simpson," the detective said. He drew the oblong box from his pocket. "Did you sell those?" he asked.

The man glanced at the box and shook his head.

"I haven't sold any of that size for two months," he said.

"Nor a gun that they would fit?"

"No. Not for three months. Permits are mighty few these days, Simpson. It's probably some of Mickey Blair's stuff."

"I supposed so," Silent said. "And the road over to Jamestown is torn up on account of the new pavement. Well, never mind."

He led Shelby back to the car. He ran it to the car line and followed that to the first street beyond the one which led down to the railroad. Presently he stopped before a square brick building.

"Why, it's a police-station, Silent," Shelby said. "What—"

"If I were going to hand you over to the police I'd tell you so," Simpson said. "Don't worry."

He sprang down and went into the station. Through the front window Shelby saw him go to the grating, back of which a man in uniform stood. They talked a few minutes. Then the officer seemed to call some one. Another man in uniform joined Simpson before the grating.

Again Simpson spoke to the first officer. Then he entered the room where the officer stood and talked at some length over the telephone there.

A moment later he and the second officer came down the walk to the car. Shelby shivered back in his seat. He had come to have a horror of the police. To have one in the same car with him was rather too close for comfort.

But the policeman did not look at him. He sat down on the rear seat. Simpson ran the car down to the tracks and stopped there.

The policeman got down. He and Simpson exchanged no word. The policeman walked along the track till he was opposite the entrance to the railroad offices. Then the shadows took him.

Simpson ran the car behind the building, and he and Shelby got down. They went

around to the side and stood there. Presently Shelby heard the sound of an approaching engine.

"We're going to have a special train over to Jamestown," Simpson said with one of his rare, brief laughs. "They're putting in a new pavement on the only road over there, and you can't get through with a car. I called up Mack and he arranged to let a switch engine go over there. It's the first station to the west, you know."

The engine stopped in front of them. A man sprang down and ran up into the dispatcher's office. He was back in two minutes.

"Who is Mickey Blair, Silent?" Shelby asked while he was gone.

"He's a crook who lives over in Jamestown," Simpson answered. "He runs a second-hand store ostensibly, but he deals in everything almost that the law prohibits a man from dealing in. Sells firearms without a permit for one thing."

"You've got to have a permit to buy a gun nowadays, have you?" Shelby asked.

"In this State you have," Simpson answered. "It's a mighty good thing, too. It'll help us to-night, I'm thinking. There's Dolan with his orders. Come on."

He walked swiftly out to the engine and climbed on board. Shelby followed him. Shelby kept his cap drawn over his eyes. Dolan glanced at him, but appeared not to recognize him.

The engine sped over to Jamestown, a distance of ten miles, and went in to clear.

"I'll be back just as soon as I can, Dolan," Simpson said.

"Take your time," Dolan returned cheerfully. "This won't be a hard job for me."

They descended from the engine. The lights of Jamestown showed against the sky just ahead of them. As they walked up a road Shelby looked at the shanty hugging the track with its block clear above it.

"Looks good to you, don't it?" Simpson asked.

"I'd work the clock around for a week just to be back," Shelby answered.

"What did Miss Sutherland have to say when you went into her house?" Simpson asked.

"She wouldn't say anything," Shelby answered.

"You don't say that very convincingly," Simpson said.

Shelby had not told Simpson about the typewriter. That, he felt, was the girl's business.

"I've kept back just one thing from you, Silent," he said. "Miss Sutherland will probably tell you about it later."

"Yes, she'll tell me a lot when I get ready," Simpson said. "It doesn't matter."

They came to another police station, almost a duplicate of the one which Simpson had visited before. A young, upstanding officer stood back of the grating.

"How're you, Mr. Simpson?" he said.

"Mickey Blair has been up to some devilment, I think," Simpson said. "Selling firearms without a permit being presented. Can you bring him in?"

"I'll bring him," the officer said.

He summoned a policeman.

"Go down to Mickey Blair's shack and bring him in," he said. "If he kicks, arrest him on suspicion."

The officer left and there was the clang of an auto-patrol outside in a moment.

"Come in and sit down," the officer invited.

Shelby followed Simpson into the other room. As he passed through the door the officer fixed him with sharp, blue eyes. He suddenly turned to Simpson.

"Why, Simpson," he said. "This is the man—"

"I know it," Simpson said quietly. "He's with me. He's mine."

"That part of it is all right," the officer said. "But I'll just keep an eye on him if you don't mind."

"I don't care what you do," Simpson said.

The officer summoned another policeman. The policeman entered the room.

"This is the man in blue that we've been looking for in connection with the Thornton case," the officer said. "Simpson has him in tow. You'll go along. Simpson seems to have a hen on. I don't want to shoo her off the nest, but you'll not lose sight of this lad."

The officer looked Shelby over calmly. Then he drew up a chair and sat down beside him. Shelby looked at Simpson. Simpson was gazing straight ahead of him, his eyes unwinking.

Shelby drew a quick breath. So far as he was concerned the game was up. Simpson would have to take care of him now.

He looked at the big, calm policeman at his elbow. The latter turned curious eyes on him. But he asked no questions. Shelby saw that the man had a bulldog tenacity, probably his chief characteristic. Escape from him would be well-nigh impossible.

The officer who had recognized him was busy with some papers lying on the window ledge. He did not look at Shelby again. He seemed to have dismissed Shelby from his mind. Shelby had to admire the keenness which had enabled him to recognize Shelby at once and the concentration which permitted him to drop Shelby from his mind a moment later.

They sat thus in silence for twenty minutes. Then there was the clang of the autopatrol outside again. A furtive, undersized man of uncertain age was presently led into the room.

The young officer looked up and nodded at a chair. Mickey Blair sank into it.

"Shoot along, Silent," the officer said.

Simpson took the oblong box and the pliers from his coat pocket and laid them on the desk. Then he sat back in his chair, his eyes, grown cold as ice and hard as stones, on Mickey Blair's face.

Mickey stared at the pliers and the box for a long time. Then he lifted his red eyes and looked at Simpson's face. His eyes did not rest there long. The coldness of the face, Simpson's ominous silence, seemed to weaken a nerve never any too good.

"Well, Mickey," the young officer said cheerfully. "Spill it."

"Spill what?" Mickey asked in a husky voice.

The officer turned to the patrolman who had brought Mickey.

"Hold Mickey on an open charge," he ordered. "Take a couple of men and go down to his place. Break in and go

through it. Turn it upside down. Take a look at everything he's got there. It's about time."

The policeman turned toward the door. Mickey Blair cleared his throat with a strangling sound.

"I sold them things, if that's what you want to know," he said.

"Without a permit?" the officer asked.

"Yeh. The man said he wanted to shoot rats."

"All the rats ought to be shot by now, Mickey," the officer said.

"Well, go ahead," Simpson snapped.

"What more?" Mickey asked.

"Who was he? If you didn't know him what did he look like?"

Mickey suddenly came to life. With many gestures he gave a minute description of the purchaser of the box of cartridges and the pliers.

"What kind of gun went with them?" Simpson asked.

"A twenty-five, you c'n see," Mickey answered; "a small automatic."

"That's all I want," Simpson said, rising.

"Lock Mickey up," the officer said briefly. "You"—to the policeman at Shelby's side—"go along with Simpson."

Simpson led the way from the station. He and Shelby climbed aboard the engine, followed by the policeman. They had to wait to get orders to go back to the yard.

When they at length pulled out, Simpson stood in the gangway, looking out into the night. After a while the lights of headquarters showed up ahead of them. Simpson turned into the cab and laid his hand on Dolan's arm.

"Can you stop a minute?" he asked.

Dolan stopped. Simpson smiled up at the policeman who was sitting on the fireman's box.

"This is your station," he said. "You can just step down."

"What's that?" the policeman asked angrily. "The sergeant said—"

"The sergeant is a brisk young man," Simpson retorted, "but like other young men he sometimes overlooks a bet. In this case he overlooked the fact that as soon as we were beyond the limits of your fair city we were out of his and your jurisdiction."

This boy is my prisoner. I'll take care of him. You couldn't take a prisoner here if you wanted to. Step down."

The policeman slid from the seat. His face was red. He glowered at Simpson.

"Oh, I know," Simpson said grimly, "like all men in uniform you have no use for a railroad sleuth. But you're going to get off right here. If you don't go willingly, I'll just throw you off. You are on railroad property just now. Nobody asked you to come here. You are a trespasser."

"You'll sweat for this, Simpson," the policeman said, but he let himself down to the ground.

"All right, Dolan," Simpson said.

They pulled down to the office building. Simpson and Shelby alighted. The engine went along to the yard. The policeman who had ridden in Simpson's car came from the shadows.

"All serene," he reported. "He hasn't come out yet."

"You'll stay on the job, will you?" Simpson asked. "I'm going up-town."

"The sergeant said to stay till you relieved me," the policeman said.

Simpson started up-town on foot.

"Silent," Shelby said, "I want to thank you—"

"Forget it," said Simpson.

"Well, there's something I want to tell you," Shelby went on.

He told him about the typewriter.

"I'm sure that Osborne wrote the note that sent me to Thornton's house that night," he concluded.

"That's a good link in the chain," Simpson said. "We'll look it up." He walked along in silence for a moment. "We'll stop at the drug-store near the restaurant where you ate your supper that night," he went on. "It might be that the phone call that Thornton got, calling him away from his boarding-house originated there. It's an all-night joint."

A hatchet-faced youth was behind the counter in the drug-store. At first he could not remember anything about the night in question.

"You're a liar," said Simpson. "You know Osborne, the copier down at headquarters, don't you?"

"I know him," the youth admitted.

"He gets his cigarets here."

"Yes."

"And an occasional nip of booze."

"We don't sell no booze."

"You're a liar again!" Simpson said.

"But that doesn't matter. It's none of my business. Did Osborne telephone from here the night I'm talking about, along toward supper time?"

"He used the phone," the youth said.

They went to the Western Union office in the next block.

"I want to find a boy who delivered a message to a man named Shelby in a restaurant on Prospect Avenue early yesterday evening," Simpson said.

"The boy is out just now, but I can tell you about the message, Mr. Simpson," the clerk said.

"Tell me, then," said Simpson.

"The call came from the drug-store near the restaurant," the clerk went on. "Man said he wanted a kid in a hurry. He gave him a message and told him to take it into the restaurant. He pointed out Shelby through the window. Gave the boy a dollar. I wondered why he didn't deliver his own message when he was right there. I asked the boy about him. He described him pretty well. Here's what he looked like in a general way, Mr. Simpson."

He gave a fair description of Osborne.

"That's all I wanted," Simpson said.

"Thank you." Then they went outside.

"We'll have to wait till five o'clock for our next step," Simpson said. "It's three now. Are you hungry?"

"As a bear," Shelby answered.

"We'll go eat," said Simpson.

"Then where are we going?"

"To talk to Osborne's wife," Simpson replied.

CHAPTER IX.

LOOSE THREADS.

"OSBORNE'S wife?" Shelby cried.

"I didn't know he had a wife."

"Not many people know it," Simpson said dryly.

"Where is she now?" Shelby asked.

"In a hospital up-town," Simpson answered. "You'll learn more about her after a bit. Let's eat now."

When their food had been served to them in the restaurant they ate in a very satisfactory silence. For that long Shelby was glad that Simpson was a silent man.

"Silent, we have some time," Shelby said when they had finished their meal. "I wish you would unravel some of this stuff for me."

"What do you want to know?" Simpson asked as he lit a long black cigar.

"I'd like to know about Miss Sutherland—not anything she wouldn't want me to know—but something that you know and that she herself probably doesn't know."

Simpson blew out a cloud of smoke. He eyed the glowing end of the cigar for a moment. Then he looked up.

"You're in love with that young lady, aren't you?" he asked.

"Certainly not," Shelby said emphatically. "I hardly know her."

"Sutherland was a fine man—for twenty-five years," Simpson said slowly. "But when he was young he stubbed his toe. He came to our road from the West and started in as an operator. By hard work he rose to be trainmaster.

"When he had been here a year he married. He got along fine. He owned the house where his wife and daughter live now, and he had money invested in a big electric company. He started to buy the stock when it was cheap. A little of it, bought then, would look like a fortune to you and me at its present value.

"So he prospered. When he died, he was worth a good deal of money in one way and another. A year and a half ago, fate handed him a knockout. He sent for me one night to meet him down-town. We went to a quiet place where we could talk. I knew something had hit him hard. I can see him right now as he was then. His face was as white as this napkin and there were tiny beads of sweat on his face.

"Silent," he said, 'I'm dying.'

"I sat and looked at him. He looked sick just that minute, but I had not noticed that he had been failing particularly up to that time.

"Oh," I said, 'you've just something on your mind.'

"I've just come from a doctor," he said. 'He says I have heart trouble. I've been feeling off-color for some time, but I thought it was my stomach. I'd wake in the night and have to sit up in bed and gasp for my breath. And, Silent, I have got something on my mind.'

"He sat picking at the table-cloth for a long time. Then he looked up again and his eyes were pretty haggard.

"Silent," he said, 'you know I've been on the level since I've been here. My life has been an open book. You know Osborne, don't you?'

"He seemed to be jumping from one notion to another, but I could see that there was a kind of sequence in his talk. I just sat there and waited.

"Silent," he said, 'when I was a kid I was hedged all about with rules. I was never permitted to live my own life for a minute. My father thought everything out for me. I had to do just as he said. So when I came to go out in the world I was like a ship without a rudder.

"I fell into the evil ways of the time and the place. I gambled and drank, and I got into debt. I invaded a man's home and ran away with his wife. She robbed him of everything he had, for he trusted her. The man followed us and killed her. He would have killed me, but I ran away. Then he killed himself. That's the kind of snake I was before I came here.'

"Oh," I said, 'lots of men make mistakes and afterward settle down and become good citizens. I think your doctor is off his trolley. I think you've been working too hard and got yourself into a nervous state. I imagine you have thought about this thing a lot, but in your present condition you can't think about it sanely.'

"Do you know Osborne's wife?" he asked.

"I didn't know he had a wife," I answered.

"She is keeping a boarding-house over on Hollister Street," he said. 'She goes under the name of Strong. Osborne married her five years ago. He treated her brutally, but she stuck to him. Thornton

is boarding there. Thornton is a pal of Osborne's. It isn't necessary for her to keep any other boarders, because Thornton pays her as much as four or five ordinary boarders would pay. Osborne furnishes the money. Osborne has Thornton there merely to keep track of her. Osborne has promised her that if she will help him in his present scheme he will make amends for the past. Don't you see, Silent?"

"I didn't see anything. I thought Sutherland was out of his mind. I even had an idea that all this stuff was the result of hallucinations. I pretty near told him that.

" 'Maybe I'm not very coherent,' he said. 'Mrs. Osborne is the daughter of the man I wronged. She was ten years old then, just old enough to remember. She told the story to Osborne, and Osborne found out where I was after a long search and followed me here. He made me get a job for him. I had to pass him off as a protégé of mine. And then, Silent, he started in to bleed me. You know I was pretty well fixed, but Osborne has taken half of what I had. Now I'm dying. When I'm gone he'll take the other half away from my wife and child.'

" 'You mean he'll threaten to expose you after your death?' I said. 'Nobody would believe him.'

" 'He's got the proof,' Sutherland said. 'Two months ago he wrote out a confession in detail and made me sign it. He has been holding it over me and he will hold it over my wife and child when I'm gone. Can't you protect them, Silent?'

Simpson paused and smoked a while in silence. He looked at Shelby keenly.

"Do you know why I'm going out of my way to tell you all this?" he asked.

"I don't," Shelby answered.

"Because you are going to marry Sutherland's daughter," Simpson said. "You're head over heels in love with her now. It's been shining in your face ever since you met her. Now, lemme give you a tip, son. Mrs. Sutherland hasn't got very far to travel. When she goes the daughter will have about twenty thousand dollars. Don't let that deter you. You're clean and you'll come along. As soon as you get a few kid notions out of your head, you'll be a man. Then you'll strike out for the big things

in this railroad game. If you're in love with this girl, go to her and have it out with her, fair and square. That's the only way.

"Well, Sutherland and I went out into the street that night and we wandered about for hours. He made me swear—it wasn't necessary—that I would somehow get hold of the confession that Osborne held. I got hold of it in Osborne's room. There isn't any confession now.

"You can tell the girl that. That's what she has been worrying about. That's what she went to see Thornton about. That's what Osborne has been holding over her. Osborne had a notion that Thornton was a dried-out old fool and he took Thornton into his confidence to a limited extent. As I say, he used Thornton to watch Mrs. Osborne, so that she wouldn't kick over the traces. But Thornton is pretty foxy. He played on Mrs. Osborne's sympathies. She was getting pretty tired of the way Osborne treated her. She spilled a lot of stuff to Thornton, so that Thornton finally held the whip hand over Osborne.

"So they both wanted to marry the Sutherland girl—partly for herself, but mostly to get the money that Sutherland had left.

"The order that Thornton forgot precipitated things. I have no doubt that Thornton forgot that order because he had this thing on his mind. That's how events will sometimes dovetail. At first when Osborne saw Thornton was in a hole, he said he wouldn't cover him up. And Thornton said if he didn't he would blow the whole business about Osborne to the girl. A few whispers under cover of the rattle of the sounders took care of that. They went to Mrs. Osborne's that morning when they got through work and they quarreled all over the house. Thornton blurted out that Osborne intended to marry Miss Sutherland as soon as he had got rid of Mrs. Osborne.

"In the end Osborne agreed to protect Thornton about the order. They seemed to come to an understanding. Well, you've heard of the fury of a woman scorned. Mrs. Osborne sent for me when Osborne and Thornton left to go to the super's office. She told me her story. That's how

I happened to be at the investigation. I hustled down to the super's office and went in by the other door. I didn't tell him anything then. I didn't want the thing to come to a climax. I just wanted to find out how capable liars Osborne and Thornton were. Your shoulders are pretty broad. I didn't think it would do you any harm to carry the burden of that accusation for a while."

"Sutherland died a year ago," Shelby said. "Why did it take you so long to land him?"

"I wanted to put him away for keeps when I did put him away," Simpson said. "He's a crook. When I can give a crook rope, I do it. Besides, Mrs. Osborne was loyal to Osborne till just recently. I don't know what she wouldn't have done for him. I had to wait for her reaction. And I had to get that confession.

"I thought at one time he was carrying it with him, because I know that he showed it to Miss Sutherland on two occasions. Each time he asked her to marry him. And each time she refused. The girl has courage.

"One night I had Osborne held up and searched, but he didn't have the paper with him. I had been planning to break into his desk for some time, but I kept putting it off, hoping there would be some other way. I'm no burglar."

"Why didn't you take Miss Sutherland into your confidence?" Shelby asked. "She would have been saved a lot of worry."

Simpson tossed his cigar on his plate. His mouth settled into grim lines. He seemed to regret having talked so much.

"Because," he said briefly, "I don't usually take people into my confidence." His mouth relaxed a little. "I've told you this because you and that girl are about to come into something clean and fine and sweet. I've seen little of that in my business. Well, let's move along."

Day had come while they had been in the restaurant. As they walked toward the hospital the sun bathed the city in its golden light.

Simpson stared straight ahead of him, a brooding look in his eyes. Shelby, being young, could not keep his heart from sing-

ing, though Simpson had just opened the book of life at a page of dark tragedy.

It was five o'clock when they reached the hospital.

"I'll have to ask you to wait at the door," Simpson said. "This is the final step and it has to be taken deliberately and cautiously."

He entered the hospital. Shelby waited patiently for half an hour. Then Simpson reappeared.

Shelby scanned his face anxiously, but there was nothing unusual about it except a glow in his eyes. He seemed abstracted, as if he were absorbed in mentally digesting something he had learned. Shelby, walking beside him, felt as if Simpson scarcely knew he was there.

They reached the railroad offices at half past five. The policeman was standing at the corner of the building. Simpson nodded to him.

"That's all I'll want," Simpson said.

The policeman left. Simpson led the way to the stairs.

"Just stand back when we get up there," he ordered. "I'll handle this thing."

They went up the stairs. As they mounted them, Shelby could hear the rattle of the telegraph instruments in the despatcher's room. He knew that the door to the hall was open.

At the landing Simpson paused, facing the open door. Beyond the door Shelby could see the night operator with his feet on the table, reading the morning paper. The despatchers' table was not in view from where Shelby stood.

Simpson took his revolver from his hip pocket and slipped it into his outside coat pocket. He stepped through the door. Shelby followed him.

The operator looked over his shoulder.

"Hello, Silent," he said sleepily.

Simpson did not reply. He walked past him till he stood opposite the despatchers' table. The despatcher and the copier on the other district were facing Simpson and Shelby. Osborne and his despatcher sat with their backs to them.

Shelby knew that Osborne must have heard the operator's greeting to Simpson, but just now Osborne was copying an order

which the despatcher was sending. He did not lift his head.

Simpson waited till the order was finished. Then he laid a heavy hand on Osborne's shoulder. Osborne looked around. He caught sight of Shelby, standing there, before he saw Simpson. He pushed back his chair and got to his feet. He and Simpson were face to face.

"Well, you've landed him, have you, Simpson?" he cried. "The man that killed my friend Thornton."

Osborne was then looking at Shelby. Shelby gazed back at him steadily. Rage was beginning to burn in Shelby's heart—a rage the hotter because it had been suppressed since he had been hunted. The sight of Osborne—the man who had hounded Miss Sutherland—kindled it afresh.

Osborne saw that rage in Shelby's eyes and his own eyes wavered away. They came to Simpson's face. Simpson was looking at him coldly, his face expressionless, his eyes as hard as flint.

The four other men in the room seemed to feel the electric current that was running through the room. The atmosphere was charged with it. The despatchers opened their keys and they and the other copier got to their feet. The night operator rose and edged over to Simpson's elbow.

Osborne found his voice. He had to say something. He could not go on staring into Simpson's eyes.

"What's the matter, Simpson?" he asked, and his voice was husky, as if it came from a dry throat. "What do you want?"

"I want you," Simpson said. "Will you go along quietly?"

Osborne felt behind him and his hand found the back of his chair. Shelby saw that he grasped the chair so tightly that the cords in his hand leaped out as big as lead pencils.

But he had to try to brazen out the situation. His face flushed, the sudden blood racing across a pallor which had preceded it.

"What bluff are you hanging now, Simpson?" he asked. "What 're you bringing this murderer up here for? Why don't you lock him up? What do you want with me?"

"You are under arrest," Simpson said.

"On what charge?"

"On a charge of attempted blackmail," Simpson answered. "Will you go quietly?"

The blood receded from Osborne's face, leaving it gray. His eyes questioned Simpson's, but Simpson's own eyes told him nothing. He suddenly relaxed.

"I'll go, but I'll make you pay for this, Simpson," he said.

Simpson, too, relaxed. He stepped back. For an instant he took his eyes from Osborne's face. In that instant Shelby saw a look of maniacal anger leap into Osborne's eyes.

"I'll go and get my coat," Osborne said thickly.

He turned toward a row of coats hanging on the wall ten feet away. He reached his own coat, but instead of taking it down he put his hand into one of the outer pockets.

Shelby, forewarned by the look in his eyes, had followed him softly half-way across the room. Simpson had stepped back and was looking at Shelby, a little curiously.

As Osborne withdrew his hand from the coat pocket, Shelby sprang. All the hate he had felt for Osborne was surging through him now. He flung one arm about Osborne's waist. The other caught Osborne's right hand as it came from the pocket.

Osborne struggled, crying bitter oaths. Shelby bent his hand back and slowly pushed it up toward his left shoulder. Osborne uttered a cry of pain and his hand opened. A revolver fell to the floor.

"There's that gun, Silent," Shelby cried.

He whirled Osborne around by suddenly pulling down his hand and twisting his arm. Then he put both hands on Osborne's chest and threw him from him. Osborne crashed against the telegraph-table, rebounded from that, and dropped to the floor. Shelby took a forward step. Osborne threw his arms above his head, as if to protect himself. Simpson jumped and barred Shelby's way.

"You did very nicely, son," Simpson said quietly. "But that's all the chance you get at him. I guess he knew what I was really going to arrest him for. Os-

borne, get on your feet and if you have any manhood in your system, display it now."

Osborne got slowly to his feet. There was a dark-red bruise on his forehead. It was the only spot of color in his drawn face.

CHAPTER X.

THE FABRIC.

THE night chief appeared in the door of the chief's office. He stood staring at the risen men.

"Wires all down, boys?" he asked. "What's the racket, Silent?"

The despatchers and the lone copier went back to work. The operator at last heard a call on one of his wires.

"Can I use your office for a minute, Mack?" Simpson asked.

"Walk in," the night chief said.

"Go on, Osborne," Simpson said.

They went in and sat down. Mack closed the door. Osborne sat looking at the floor.

"Where've you been, Shelby?" Mack asked.

"Knocking around," Shelby answered.

"Shelby," Simpson said, "tell Osborne what you know."

Shelby squirmed in his seat. He saw that Simpson was going to live up to his reputation for silence.

"Well," Shelby said, "it runs about like this: Osborne and Thornton were pals. They cooked up a blackmail scheme. The person they were trying to blackmail stood out against them.

"Thornton forgot an order and said he had sent it to me. He and Osborne quarreled about it. Osborne said he wouldn't cover up Thornton. Thornton said if Osborne didn't Thornton would tell what he knew. So Osborne shielded Thornton.

"Osborne is married, though nobody knew it. Thornton boarded at Mrs. Osborne's. Thornton and Osborne had a quarrel at Mrs. Osborne's, and Thornton, losing his temper, told Mrs. Osborne a lot about her husband.

"Osborne wrote a message on his machine in his rooms and sent it to me, sign-

ing Thornton's name to it, and saying Thornton wanted to see me. Then he had Thornton leave the house for a while, so that Thornton wouldn't be there to deny he had sent me a message. I asked for Thornton, and Mrs. Osborne said he wasn't at home. I left for a while. When I came back Mrs. Osborne set a policeman on me. Thornton had been murdered and it looked as if the man who had been asking for him might have had something to do with it. Say, Silent, why did Mrs. Osborne set that policeman on me when she knew I was innocent?"

"She had been threatened," Simpson said.

"Why didn't she tell the police that Miss—Miss—"

"Had been there?" Simpson finished for him. "Because she was sorry for the girl. They had had a talk, and Mrs. Osborne knew that Osborne was to blame for everything."

"The note that Osborne sent to me had been written on a machine that the period was missing from," Shelby went on. "I got that machine from Osborne's room. We found that Osborne had telephoned for a messenger to deliver his message to me, and that he had telephoned to Thornton to get Thornton out of the house.

"You see, I had struck Thornton, like the chump I was, and Osborne thought he saw a chance to establish a motive for the killing of Thornton. Gee, I wouldn't kill a man! I guess that's all, isn't it, Simpson?"

Osborne raised his head. There was a little light of hope in his eyes.

"If that's all, what's the use of staying here, chewing the rag, Simpson?" he said. "If you're going to arrest me on this trumped-up blackmail charge why don't you do it?"

"You think the charge is trumped-up?" Simpson asked.

"I know it. I can prove it."

"Then I'd rather not arrest you on that charge, had I?" Simpson asked.

There was a sneer on Simpson's lips. His eyes were contemptuous. Osborne shivered as if he were cold, despite the growing heat of the morning.

"What do you mean now?" he asked.

Simpson leaned forward in his chair.

"I'll just tell you, Osborne," he said in a low voice. "I saw Mrs. Osborne in the hospital this morning. I went over this thing with her. She is suffering from nervous exhaustion and she was glad at last to rid her mind of the whole business. She's a broken woman, ill and alone. Aren't you proud of that?"

"You'll keep away from her," Osborne said with as much viciousness as he could put into his trembling voice. "She's my wife, you'll just remember."

"She told me how she had come back to the house that night in the rain," Simpson said. "As she opened the front door there was a shot. With the pliers you bought from Mickey Blair you had cut away the screen from a rear window and entered the house. Thornton, meeting no one at the place you had named, had returned home.

"Mrs. Osborne ran into the hall just as you started down the stairs. In your hand you held the gun you had bought from Mickey Blair. Thornton lay in his room dying.

"Mrs. Osborne cried out at you. You threatened her with the gun. You said you'd kill her if she ever told. She was terribly frightened. You made her go on her knees and swear she would protect you. You made her promise to call the police as soon as you had left and to tell them about Shelby's visit to the house—to tell about that in such a way that the police would at once suspect Shelby. Terrified, she obeyed you.

"But reaction came to her and a nervous illness. In that reaction and that illness she has told the truth to me.

"Osborne, you killed Thornton yourself. You fired into his body one of the cartridges you bought from Mickey Blair. You fired it from the gun that Shelby knocked out of your hand in the other room. I've waited some time to get you right and now I've got you. If you make a move I'll shoot you dead.

"You've played the lowest, meanest game a man can play. You can't make amends, but you can pay, and I'm going to take a

lot of satisfaction out of making you pay. My car is down-stairs. Come on. I'll take you to the station."

Osborne tried to rise, but seemed helpless. Simpson walked over to him and roughly assisted him. They passed through the door when Shelby had opened it. Shelby stood there till they had crossed the despatchers' room, passed through the hall door, and were on their way down the stairs. Then Shelby turned to the night chief.

"Silent is certainly a rough customer when he gets started, isn't he?" the night chief asked.

"He's rough, but he's square," Shelby said. "Mr. Mack, I wonder if I get my job back?"

"Why, sure," Mack said. "You better come down and see Drake after breakfast. I'll be through pretty soon. Come up and eat with me."

"Simpson and I had breakfast a while ago," Shelby said. "I've got to go up-street for a minute."

"I'll tell Drake about this when he shows up," Mack said.

"Much obliged," said Shelby.

He went into the despatchers' room. The night operator was working on the east wire. Some one was calling on the west wire.

"Shall I take that?" Shelby asked.

"Sure, if you want to," the operator answered.

A station along the line had a lone, brief message. Shelby took it and gave his O. K. As he went down the stairs his finger-tips tingled.

"Gee!" he murmured. "Won't I be glad to get back?"

He walked rapidly up the street to the car line corner. He was about to board a car when some one seized him and drew him back. He turned to look up into the red face of a policeman.

"Nix on that," the policeman said. "You been roamin' for quite a spell and you're beginnin' to get your nerve, ain't you? Well, we been combin' the town for you again since Jamestown phoned over that you had been there and Simpson had got you away on a railroad engine. Simpson is a fresh guy, ain't he? Well, you come along."

He dug stubby fingers into Shelby's arm and marched him along the street till they came to the station which Shelby and Simpson had visited earlier in the evening. The policeman hustled Shelby inside. He marched him up to the grating. Beyond it a gray-haired man and Simpson were talking together. The gray-haired man looked up.

"All right, Bolton," he said. "We don't want that boy now. Turn him loose. There's a new angle to that case. We've got our man locked up."

The policeman grinned sheepishly and released his hold of Shelby. He turned and went out into the street. Shelby followed him.

"That was Simpson in there," Shelby said. "Shall I tell him you said he was a fresh guy? He's a friend of mine."

"You better get out of here before I run you in," the policeman said.

Shelby hastened out to the car line again. In spite of the fact that he had been without sleep he had never felt more awake in his life. He was no longer hunted and he was going to see a girl with gray eyes.

The girl opened the door of her home herself. Her eyes had a tired look in them, but they brightened at sight of Shelby.

"I just want to tell you something," Shelby said. "I won't keep you a minute."

"Come in, please," she said.

He followed her into the hall, and she turned and faced him, searching his eyes.

"What is it?" she asked.

"Osborne is under arrest for killing Thornton," Shelby said. "Silent Simpson told me a while ago that that confession was no longer in existence. He took it from Osborne's room and destroyed it."

The girl stood staring at him for a moment. Then a rush of tears filled the gray eyes. She turned and walked blindly into the room at her right.

There was silence in the house for several minutes. Shelby was undecided what to do. Delicacy urged him to leave, but he felt as if he could not go till he had seen her restored to herself.

She was gone so long that he had turned to the door to open it. Then she appeared

in the doorway. She had conquered her tears, but there were traces of them on her cheeks and in her eyes.

"Forgive me," she said in a low voice. "But the thought that I would no longer have to worry about that—that mother and I were safe—overwhelmed me. Come in and tell me about yourself."

Shelby followed her into the room. They sat down as they had sat the night before. He told his story. She laughed when he told about his belated arrest.

"There's one thing I don't understand," Shelby said. "I don't see now what help you expected for yourself from my getting hold of Osborne's typewriter. That had nothing to do with what you were interested in, except as it might prove Osborne guilty of killing Thornton."

A bright flush leaped into the girl's face.

"Why," she said, "I didn't expect anything from it—for myself. I thought it might help to establish your innocence. I wanted to help you."

Shelby sat looking into her eyes. It was very easy to look into her eyes now.

"Oh," he said at last, "I see."

There was a moment's silence.

"I must go," Shelby said. "I've got to get back to work. I must see the chief. Then I'll have to look up that woman who helped me to escape from Osborne and the policeman. Then I must see Sweeney or send word to him that I'll pay him back that ten I owe him. And I ought to see Simpson for a minute. I'll have to go up in the woods and see if my clothes are worth digging up. I—"

"You have so very much to do that I suppose I won't see you again," the girl said.

"Gee," Shelby broke out, "I knew that's the way you'd be the minute you didn't have anything to worry about! I'll be back as soon as I get myself squared away. I want to see you."

"Well, I won't keep you now," she said.

She put out her right hand, and Shelby took it. He slowly advanced his left hand and she laid her left hand in it. She looked up at him, smiling faintly, with a shy, adorable light in her gray eyes.

(The end.)

Doubles and Quits

Part III

By *Elizabeth York Miller*

Author of "Folly's Harvest," "Diana the Hunted," "The Greatest Gamble," etc.



WHAT HAS ALREADY HAPPENED

DISOWNED by her wealthy aunt because of her marriage to Dick Marshall, a poor clerk in Peter Tremlett's office, Amy is nevertheless very happy. Badly in debt and almost penniless, because of illness and misfortune, they are one day amazed by the receipt of a hundred-pound note in an anonymous printed letter. Thinking it a gift from her aunt, Amy proceeds to spend the money wisely, but later, when she calls to thank her aunt, the latter denies sending it. That night Peter Tremlett and the town constable call and arrest Dick, charging him with the theft of the money from Tremlett's desk. Dick is brought to trial and sentenced to eight months' hard labor, but Amy knows that he is innocent and resolves to struggle on until he is free. Alone and helpless, she is compelled to accept Tremlett's offer of assistance and is employed as a house-keeper in his home, where he lives with his sister. There she soon suspects Tremlett of having something to do with the charge against Dick and at the first chance pries open his desk. Just as she comes upon a box of writing-paper precisely like that of the anonymous letter Tremlett enters and catches her in the act.

That encounter with Tremlett brings on a severe attack of brain fever, and Amy lies unconscious for weeks. When she regains consciousness Tremlett's sister informs her that Dick has died in prison fighting an epidemic. Desperately alone now, Amy is further tortured by Tremlett's proposal of marriage. In despair she flees to London, where she finds it impossible to get work, and is at last driven to thoughts of suicide. On the point of casting herself into the river she is caught by another girl, expensively dressed, but also despondent. As they look into each other's faces they are stunned. In features, coloring and expression they are identical! Doubles! An exchange of stories leads to an exchange of identities and names. In this way each girl hopes to escape her fate. But in telling her story Amy's double omits an important chapter, and Amy's search for that missing chapter is beset with problems.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE MISSING CHAPTER.

AND now came the strangest of all sensations. Amy had to think of herself as Loraine Drew and the complete mistress of everything in this cozy apartment. All the pretty dresses

hanging in the cupboards were hers, the letters and papers in the despatch box, the bits of jewelry, the furniture, the money: Mrs. Sponch, who allowed herself to be called Old Sponger, would come at eight o'clock, turn on a bath, and provide breakfast. That would be the first test. Loraine said that the mere fact of the supper-tray

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having been disposed of would be sufficient to make Old Sponger suspicious that something was wrong, but of course she meant that for a joke.

Amy went to bed about four o'clock, but it would be untrue to say that she really slept. It was so uncanny, this stepping into another girl's shoes, that every nerve tingled with excitement. Hundreds of questions hurled themselves at her.

How was Loraine getting on? Would she be unable to sleep also? Even though they were alike as two peas, wouldn't any one who knew either of them detect the difference in their voices and manners? Wouldn't Peter Tremlett know at once? At thought of him Amy grew very hard. Once could scarcely say that he was being punished as he deserved. Even though they succeeded in cheating him, he might be satisfied with his bargain; and also he might never discover that he had been cheated. Was it fair to Dick's memory that all Witcham, and most particularly Peter Tremlett, should believe that Amy had so soon forgotten her poor husband?

But it was too late to worry about that now. Besides, Dick was where no earthly power could hurt him, and if he knew he would understand. The purpose which had brought those two girls together was anything but blind. There might be something tremendous behind it; something which Amy felt instinctively but as yet could not see.

Her eyes closed at last, but it seemed that only a moment passed before they opened again under a hot blaze of sunshine. Somebody was jerking aside the window curtains.

"Come, now, miss—the bath 'll be getting cold, and you not up yet. Wasn't you telling me to call you sharp this morning?"

A hearty voice boomed out, and Amy saw a stout, red-faced woman standing at the foot of the bed beaming down on her. It was the first and most severe test.

"Righto, Sponger," she retorted, and she was amazed at herself for being able to bring out the words so aptly.

"No turnings over for another forty winks," admonished Mrs. Sponch. "I see

you et your supper, so you won't want no breakfast, I take it."

"Indeed I shall!" Amy exclaimed. "This is going to be a busy day."

"My word, deary—don't tell me I can coax you to an egg. Me heart is weak."

"Two, if you've got 'em," Amy replied in what she hoped was Loraine Drew's best manner.

"Wonders never cease," muttered the charwoman as she ambled off.

Amy drew in a deep breath. Old Sponger hadn't suspected a thing. It was like a miracle.

But the ordeal was to go a little further, for after she had had her bath and spent some time in hunting for clothes, Mrs. Sponch came to tell her that breakfast was ready, and stood over her in the studio while she ate it, making personal comments.

"Well, miss, I'm glad to see a change has come over you. A swill o' tea is better 'n champagne for breakfast any time, and there's more nourishment in an egg than in a cigaret. Why, bless me, miss, you're looking another person already!"

Amy started and raised the teacup to her lips.

"You've got a better color, for one thing. I guess you didn't sit up all night reading them trashy books."

"That's where you're wrong," Amy said boldly. "I hardly went to bed at all, but I didn't do any reading."

"What, then?" asked Old Sponger, who obviously took a keen interest in her lady's affairs.

"Oh, just thinking things over. I shall have to hurry, sha'n't I?"

She got up and began to adjust a bright-red hat she had found in Loraine's cupboard.

Mrs. Sponch was suddenly taken with a devastating fit of laughter.

"What's the matter with you?" Amy asked in her own faltering voice. Had she been discovered?

"Oh, miss—oh, miss, forgive me! But you owe me a pound, indeed you do! Don't tell me you've forgotten."

"I'm afraid I have. My memory's been something shocking lately."

She—as Loraine Drew—might conceiv-

ably owe her charwoman a pound, but that was no reason for hysterics.

"Th-that hat!" shrieked Old Sponger, exploding raucously. "You bet me a pound to 'arf a crown you'd never wear it again because Miss Allison had been and had it copied. And I said—"

"How could I forget!" Amy exclaimed, dimpling in spite of her nervous anxiety.

Instinct told her what Loraine Drew would do in this matter. She dived down into Loraine's bag and brought forth a pound note.

"Here you are, Sponger," Amy said.

There ensued a slight argument, but in the end Mrs. Sponch allowed the debt of honor to be paid.

"I don't know when I've felt so heartened about you," the woman said, as she speeded Amy off. "There'll be something extra on the tray to-night, and if you eat it I'll burn a candle at St. Mary's to our Blessed Lady in thanks. God knows, deary, I've been that worried about you lately, I've taken the liberty of praying over it."

"Have you?" Amy asked. Her thoughts flew to the other girl. What had been in that missing chapter? Something vital, undoubtedly.

"You're not angry, miss?" Mrs. Sponch asked anxiously over the banister rail.

"No, old thing. Perhaps your prayers will be answered. One could only be grateful for them."

Old Sponger went back into the studio and picked up the breakfast tray with a meditative air.

"Changed—what you'd call a miracle. I always knew she'd be all right if that black-hearted devil with his cocain kept away from her long enough. If only she could get somewhere that he couldn't find her. I'll swear he hasn't been here these last three days. Perhaps the police have got him. I hope so."

If Amy only knew, Old Sponger could have supplied the contents of that missing chapter.

It may be imagined, however, that Amy's mind was very much taken up with herself at this moment. Tremendous difficulties faced her. On her way to the rehearsal at

the Augustin Theater she concentrated upon gathering every ounce of courage at her command.

CHAPTER XIX.

TREMLETT CALLS.

THERE was an expression of cruel triumph in the eyes of Peter Tremlett as he got out of a taxicab at Mrs. Kidder's that morning. He had been in no hurry at all, for he did not know he was expected. First he had gone to a hotel, where he refreshed himself, breakfasted hugely, and left his bag. He hugged to himself the pleasant assurance that Amy could not escape him.

Poor Elspeth had allowed herself to be completely beguiled by Mrs. Dundas, and shown her Amy's last letter, which had been rather doleful. The child was discouraged, and had found no work. And then Aunt Anna, instead of doing what she had promised and sending Amy money, together with an invitation to return to the home of her childhood, had betrayed her to Peter Tremlett.

It may be that Mrs. Dundas conceived this plan to be for Amy's ultimate good. It may be that at heart she hated the girl of whom her dead husband had been so fond, and who was really no blood kin of her own. Of that, more later. Old Elspeth's part in this tale is by no means played out, and it was through Elspeth that Amy was one day to discover a dark secret Aunt Anna had borne the burden of for years. But this is anticipating, and has nothing directly to do with Peter Tremlett and his passion for the girl whose life he had laid waste.

It was about ten o'clock when he rang the bell at Mrs. Kidder's, and Rose, the maid of all work, opened the door to him. In answer to his question she said yes, Mrs. Marshall was living here, but was not yet up.

"As a rule," volunteered Rose, "she's out of the house by this time, but I couldn't hardly make her hear when I knocked an hour ago, and the tea-tray and hot water's still waiting at her door."

A vague sense of alarm disturbed Tremlett's satisfaction.

"Here, my girl, there's a shilling for you. Get Mrs. Marshall to answer you, and tell her a gentleman has called to see her on business—about a situation, you understand."

Rose smiled radiantly.

"Indeed, sir, I thank you, and it 'll be good news to Mrs. Marshall. The feet of her is worn off looking for work. What name shall I say?"

"It doesn't matter about the name," Tremlett replied brusksly. "Where can I wait?"

Rose opened the door of a tiny parlor at the back.

"I'm afraid we're rather full up, sir. This is Mrs. Kidder's private room, but she won't mind if I show you in here."

A fever of anxiety was on Tremlett now. His pulse beat unsteadily. She was here under this very roof, and it seemed as if he had but to reach out his hand to take her—yet who could tell that she might not manage to escape him again? If only by hook or crook he could get her back to Witcham in his own house, it would be easier to wear down that baffling resistance which had all but beaten him. Strange that one so weak could give him so much trouble.

The morning had begun with sunshine, but suddenly the skies clouded over and it began to rain. After the heat the pavements fairly steamed and the air was sullen and vaporous.

Mrs. Kidder's little parlor was crowded with furniture and knick-knacks—the keepsakes of a lifetime all hoarded together in a space of twelve by nine—and the one window overlooked a dismal sooty stretch of what by courtesy might be called a garden. Was it possible that Amy could prefer such a spot to the magnificent home he was only too anxious to offer her?

Half an hour passed, and Tremlett's nervousness increased. Could she have suspected his identity? Perhaps she had questioned the servant as to the appearance of the "gentleman" who had taken the trouble to look her up.

The door was slightly ajar, and as he

heard some one descending the stairs he rushed out to determine that if it were Amy he would allow her no chance to get by.

The girl coming down halted and gave a low cry. One hand gripped the banister hard, while the other flew to her lips in a gesture of dismay.

"You!" she exclaimed in a hoarse little voice that scarcely seemed to be Amy Marshall's.

CHAPTER XX.

WHERE TRAILS-CROSS.

UNLIKE Amy, Loraine Drew had slept in those few hours before the dawn. She had slept soundly for the first time in many months, for it seemed to her that the shadow of a terrible temptation had been removed forever. The temptation would mean nothing to Amy, yet Loraine knew that she should have warned that confiding child who had stepped into her shoes. Indeed, she had meant to do so, but Amy's entire innocence had shamed her.

How could she say, "Don't be tempted to touch drugs, particularly cocaine!"

It was the one attribute of herself that she had not left with Amy, but brought with her—the little box with enough of the white powder left to help her over this last ordeal. In such new surroundings as Witcham, with no pain to conquer and the excitement of having plenty of money to spend without earning it, Loraine Drew was confident that she could shake off the deadly habit.

So she slept, and so soundly that Rose had difficulty in awakening her.

"All right," she yawned. "I'll be down as soon as I'm dressed."

"The gentleman's waiting in Mrs. Kidder's parlor," said Rose, surprised that Mrs. Marshall betrayed no curiosity about him. "I'm afraid your tea and the water will be cold."

"Never mind," Loraine replied, giving Rose the benefit of a full-face smile.

It was a good test, but Rose suspected nothing. However, the real test would come when she met this Peter Tremlett.

Loraine did not hurry. She drank half a cup of lukewarm tea and made a wry face over it. Then she washed and dressed herself. She was ready to go down finally, but her hands were twitching and she felt altogether queer and shaky. It was not that she dreaded what lay before her. That, in her opinion, was a game. But of course it would be a little difficult, and a pinch or two of the white drug would restore her completely. For a day or two, perhaps, she would continue to need it, and it was rather lucky she had brought the little box with her instead of burning it, as had half been her intention last night.

She was feeling quite her debonair self, almost too much so, as she descended the stairs. She had to remember that she was no longer slangy Loraine Drew, of the Augustin Theater chorus, but widowed Amy Marshall, who was being pursued by a determined lover. She had to remember, too, that the eyes of a lover are very keen.

One fact, however, helped tremendously in the case of each girl, quite apart from their uncanny resemblance, and this was that no one coming into contact with either would remotely suspect the idea of such a deception. It might appear that some small change had taken place in voice, gesture, or even in character, but in Loraine's case there was Amy's long illness and the subsequent ordeal of searching for work which might have brought about alterations.

The point was that Peter Tremlett expected to find Amy at Mrs. Kidder's, and while there might be subtle points of difference between her and Loraine, he would scarcely suspect that another girl had taken her place. Realizing this, Loraine had full confidence in the success of the audacious plan. It would succeed because of its very audacity.

She had the sense of humor often possessed by tragic souls, and it was difficult for her not to overact Amy's gentle shyness and manner of timidity. In the hands of a mimic it tended to become a trifle mincing.

"Yes—me," Tremlett replied grimly to her cry of surprise. "You weren't expecting me, I take it."

"N-no, I wasn't," Loraine faltered. If

she had had any doubt before that this tall, sardonic man was the Peter Tremlett of Amy's description it vanished.

"Come in here; I want to talk to you," he said.

She followed him meekly with bowed shoulders and a handkerchief pressed to her lips. There was not the defiance he had expected, and this had the effect of rousing the bully in him.

"So you ran away! Do you think you have had enough of it?" he demanded when they were alone together in the little parlor and he had closed the door.

"I've had a very hard time," she acknowledged.

"Well? Are you ready to come back to Witcham with me?"

"I—I couldn't. People would talk so."

"What do you mean?"

"I don't know." She gave a wonderful show of weeping.

In an instant Tremlett swept her into his arms.

"I'd follow you to the ends of the earth!" he exclaimed in a voice that would have terrified the real Amy. There was a veritable ring of doom in it. "I told you so in Witcham. Don't think you're clever enough or strong enough to get away from me again. And you'll be happy after we're married. I know more about women than you'd guess. Amy, you've got to marry me, and I won't wait either. After this, I won't wait at all."

"You mean a special license—marry you here, in London?" Loraine whimpered.

He hadn't meant that. His whole life was so bounded by Witcham that it had never occurred to him to have the ceremony performed elsewhere.

"Why—why, if you got the license to-day, you could marry me here in London to-morrow," she wailed.

"Exactly," Tremlett said without a second's hesitation.

He was almost out of his mind with the joy of conquering her.

"I suppose you're penniless," he added with a grim chuckle.

"I've got just sevenpence, and I haven't had anything to eat since yesterday noon," she replied.

Both of those statements were quite true.

"You needn't think I'm going to give you any money," he said roughly, "because you might take it into your head to bolt. But you can come out with me and have some food, and we'll talk things over."

"I'm ashamed—in these clothes," Loraine objected. "London's so fine. I feel horribly shabby."

Tremlett drew in a long breath. So it was poverty which had beaten her down. Perhaps her running away had taught her a lesson.

"I'll buy you anything you want, but do you know what shops to go to?"

Loraine laughed, and failed to notice that he gave her a sharp look because the sound of that laughter was so unlike Amy's.

"Do I know the shops?" she repeated excitedly. "Well, I ought to. I've tramped about enough, looking for work."

"Amy, something's come over you. You—you're different," he said in a puzzled tone. "I don't know what it is—"

"I'd have to be different if I consented to marry you," she retorted quickly. "Do you think I've forgotten what you did to me? You'll have a job making me forget, Peter Tremlett. No, I'm not the same girl I was. I admit that. For one thing, I've learned to smoke."

Peter was shocked, but also a little frightened. If he had already driven her to such lengths she might have gone to worse. Perhaps in consenting to marry him she had realized that it was a choice between that and the fate of so many pretty girls who have neither the strength nor the wit to make their own way in the world. Lucky he had found her in time.

When Loraine retired to the small back bedroom at Mrs. Kidder's that night it was nearly twelve o'clock. It had been a most successful day from her point of view, and she had led Peter Tremlett a merciless dance. It was also a day which had contained one moment of real fright.

He had kept her with him almost every moment. First they had driven in a cab to the London branch of his bank, and he had drawn out a great deal of money.

Then they bought the special marriage license, by which time the luncheon hour had arrived.

Loraine said she had heard that the Savoy was an interesting place to have lunch, but she disliked going there looking so shabby. Tremlett, however, insisted. He was in a festive mood, and somehow or other champagne was suggested. He was not accustomed to anything so stimulating in the middle of the day, and after that he was as wax in the girl's hands.

She made the most of her opportunity, and dragged him about from shop to shop. The fright came when, driving through Leicester Square about four o'clock on their way to have tea somewhere, they passed the Augustin Theater, from which the long rehearsal had just been released. Among the throng of girls streaming down the narrow court at the side Loraine's quick eyes picked out a familiar red hat. The taxi was held up for a moment, and the girl wearing the red hat crossed the street directly in front of them. It was Amy Marshall.

Had Tremlett seen her?

Loraine could scarcely trust herself to speak, but when she found courage—after a breathless interval—to turn to him, she saw that his head was sunken on his breast and his eyelids closed. Thanks to fatigue and the day's dissipations, he was half asleep. It had been a near shave, and Loraine nearly collapsed after it.

He took her back to Mrs. Kidder's and waited in the little parlor while she went up-stairs to put on some of the new finery, and then they went out again, to dinner and a theater. Apparently the girl was tireless, but when he left her finally Peter Tremlett was on the verge of complete exhaustion.

He told himself that it had been the happiest day of his life, and that he was the happiest man in the world, for to-morrow was his wedding day. When Amy was his wife he could begin to mold her a little more to his wishes. For one thing, the extravagant pace he himself had set could not go on. Already his real nature was stealthily prompting him to turn aside from all this wasteful expenditure, but for the

moment, of course, Amy must have her head.

And what of Loraine? What were her feelings toward this stranger she had recklessly pledged herself to marry? Was it possible that the girl could retain even a shadow of self-respect after making such a bargain?

But, poor thing, so warped and twisted had become her conception of life that she actually hailed Peter Tremlett as one who would help to restore her self-respect. She was selling herself to him in order to obtain a greater freedom, or so she hoped—a freedom of the soul. Never again would she need to dance and so bring on that torturing pain which had driven her to drugs. Never again would the tempter with his illicit wares cross her path. She scarcely gave a thought to the man who was to be her husband.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE NEW "MISS DREW."

HOW Amy Marshall got through that first day she could never afterward remember with any certainty of detail. It was just one long, mad series of blunders, during which she lost her head times without number.

To begin with, there was the stage door of the Augustin Theater, where a man behind a wicket challenged her entrance by asking for her name. Unthinkingly she said "Marshall," and, running an eye down his list, he told her that the chorus was full up and no more applications were to be considered.

"But I—I was told—I mean to say, I'm already engaged," she stammered.

Then of course she remembered that her name now was Loraine Drew, and the man said:

"Oh, yes, 'Drew's' all right. You'll find Mr. Punter on the stage."

It was the beginning of all the mistakes, and she felt that she had made a bad start, not realizing that the doorkeeper was quite used to young ladies of the stage calling themselves by different names and did not give the incident even a query in his mind.

In the corridor she passed with averted eyes a tall blond girl who caught her sharply by the arm.

"Well, what are you cutting me for?" the girl demanded.

Loraine had said that there was only one member of the newly selected chorus with whom she was acquainted, and out of her dense mental confusion Amy realized that this must be the one. Heavens, what was her name?

"I'm sorry; I didn't see you," Amy apologized.

"You didn't want to see me, and I know why," snapped the tall blond. "I suppose you think I don't know you've 'lamped' Teddie Butcher, but if you think I'm going to stand for any boy-stealing from me, you're good and mistaken, Loraine Drew. I'll put him wise to some of your funny little habits, see if I don't. He's a straight kid and hates dope like poison. So put that in your pipe and smoke it."

Releasing Amy, the girl tossed her head and passed on. So here was a ready-made enemy. The dismayed Amy remembered that the girl's name was Leslie Allison, but Teddie Butcher was a person who had never been mentioned.

She paused for a few seconds at the end of the corridor in order to collect her scattered wits. From Miss Allison's impassioned speech she gathered that this Teddie Butcher, whoever he was, had lately transferred his affections from Leslie to Loraine; and again that mysterious word "dope" had cropped up. Could it be possible that she had stepped into the shoes of a girl who was known to be a drug fiend?

Loraine had given her the merest hint, to which Old Sponger had added another, and now her inherited enemy, Leslie Allison, had made the matter a little plainer.

The stage manager—how was she to address him? As an intimate?

A chatter of voices told her which way to go, and she emerged through the dusty wings onto the great stage of the Augustin. A boy thrust a musical score into her hand, and she tried to lose herself among the thirty or more girls who were waiting for the rehearsal to begin.

Somebody called "Mr. Punter!" and a

small, dark man rose up from behind a piano to respond. He was nearly bald and had a hooked nose and unpleasantly red lips. After attending to what was wanted, he caught sight of Amy and hurried over to her, while some of the girls nudged each other, and Leslie Allison coughed in a fashion designed to attract attention to the incident.

"How's your ankle?" the little dark man asked in a confidential whisper.

"Quite all right this morning," Amy replied.

"I went around to your place about seven o'clock last evening, but you were out. Let me know if you want any coke. I've got some with me." He tapped a waistcoat-pocket and winked solemnly and significantly.

Amy nodded, but said nothing. She had not the least idea what he meant.

It were kinder to draw a veil over her experiences of the actual rehearsal.

Once Mr. Punter roared at her: "Anybody 'd think you'd never seen a stage before in your life!"

All the girls giggled, and Leslie Allison broke into a noisy laugh.

The humiliation and misery of it were indescribable. Poor Amy would have done much better could she have acknowledged herself an absolute novice. There was so much they took for granted that she knew. So she blundered on and on, blinded by tears half the time, completely submerged in confusion.

In no time the word had gone around that she was a dope fiend, and now she knew what it meant. She caught whispers to the effect that "Punter was sweet on her," but he'd "have to scrap her or hoodoo the show."

In a gasping, breathless interval he came over to her again, perspiration pouring down his face.

"What in time's the matter with you?" he pleaded. "You've overdone it, my girl. I always warned you not to let coke be your master. You're absolutely groggy this morning."

Amy burst into tears, and he led her behind a piece of scenery while he further admonished her, but not unkindly.

"I know your ankle gives you hell, and you've got your living to make, but for God's sake pull up. The old man doesn't stand for favorites, and if he twigs it you're in the show just because I want you here he'll sack the both of us. You don't want to lose me my job, do you?"

"I—I'll go," Amy sobbed. "I'm no good, and I know it. Oh, why did I ever take it on?"

"Now, that's no way to talk, after all I've done for you. Look here; I'll come around and coach you this evening. It's just the dope. You're loaded with it."

"I'm not!" she flashed back. "I've never touched such things—" She was going to add "in my life," but caught herself up in time.

The little hook-nosed man drew down the corners of his mouth and laughed. "You don't need to lie to me," he said contemptuously, and walked off.

All day long the torture went on. There was half an hour allowed for lunch, but Amy made use of an empty dressing-room in which to munch a sandwich and puzzle over the baffling music of the score she had.

And then, quite suddenly, toward the end she began to get a grasp of the things which were expected of her. Fortunately she was not the only awkward one of the flock. There were several others, and Mr. Punter made the most of them. Leslie Allison, however, slipped into her work with the ease of long practise and perfect self-confidence. She was picked at once for the quintet and various other specialties, and it was most apparent from her manner that Amy was supposed to be jealous of her.

But poor Amy had no time that day to indulge in the emotion of jealousy, although she could not help being rather envious of Miss Allison's proficiency. At the end Simon Punter's hand dropped familiarly to her shoulder and he whispered in her ear:

"You're getting on all right now, kid. You lost your nerve this morning, that's all. I'll be around at eight, and you might have something for me to eat."

Amy was an absolute wreck when she got back to Lawrence Street. Mrs. Sponch was in the little kitchen making ready the cold supper which she always left for Lor-

aine before finishing up her day's work, and she hurried into the studio to find the supposed Miss Drew crumpled up on the couch in tears.

"Oh, deary, is your foot bad again?" the sympathetic soul cried.

"And that doctor's all wrong," she continued. "I say it ought to be bandaged, but I suppose it's no good going against his orders. Can I get you something, deary?"

"A cup of tea, if you'll be so kind," Amy replied.

The old woman's lips trembled. "I know tea's much better for you, but if you're in such pain perhaps you'd rather have something stronger. It isn't in the heart of me to see you suffer so."

"No, thank you, Sponger. Tea is all I want. And it isn't really my ankle. It's just been a horrid beastly day. By the way, a gentleman by the name of Mr. Punter is coming to see me this evening. I believe he expects to be given supper—"

Mrs. Sponch's face took on such an expression of mingled annoyance and perplexity that Amy knew she had blundered again. "He's the stage manager at the Augustin," she explained awkwardly.

"You talk as though I don't know who he is," Old Sponger said coldly. "Well, I'm sorry to hear he's coming again. I thought—I was hoping—you were through with him and—his tricks. Oh, Miss Loraine, deary, the man 'll never be any good to you in this world!"

"I don't think he'll do me any harm," Amy replied a little distantly. "If you must know, he's coming out of kindness to coach me in my work. I'm terribly stupid."

Old Sponger laughed derisively and went back to her kitchen.

CHAPTER XXII.

OUT OF THE PIT.

ON the 10th of October the Augustin Theater was scheduled to open its season with the much-advertised musical comedy, "The Raja." The finished production was a sumptuous and bril-

liant affair, and no one would have been more amazed than Amy Marshall could she have foreseen her own place in it that day of the first rehearsal when ignominy and defeat stared her in the face. One might write endlessly of her various experiences, her trials and worries, but as time went on and she held grimly to the task it was plain that she was going to succeed.

Also, it became easier to think of herself as Loraine Drew, and more difficult to confuse her.

Fortunately the mysterious Teddie Butcher explained himself in a letter before he turned up. He proved to be the sender of the brace of grouse, one of which had been fed to Amy that night when she was starving. He sent more grouse, and announced his return from Scotland by a telegram, saying that although he might not get a chance to see her before he would assuredly be present at the first performance of "The Raja," and hoped she would do him the honor of letting him take her out to supper after the performance.

Early in the morning of this eventful 10th of October something of great importance was happening in a bleak gray spot in the north.

Quentin Prison lies in the midst of rolling downland. For miles around there are only the bare hills with a little hamlet of stunted houses clustering not far from the prison walls. A mile below a solitary railway line winds away from the most primitive of stations. Two trains a day connect with the junction twenty miles away, and from there one may reach Witcham in three-quarters of an hour by rail.

The evening train to Quentin brought incoming prisoners and the friends or relatives of men who were to be released the following morning. These latter would put up for the night at the so-called hotel. The morning train, which left at nine o'clock, took away the men whose sentences were up, together with the aforesaid friends and relatives, should there happen to be any. It was a lonely prisoner, indeed, who could not count upon either his wife or his mother to be waiting for him when the great gates opened and he walked forth once more a free man.

Of late, however, there had been no visitors to Quentin. Although the town itself had escaped the dreadful scourge, it had been cut off from the rest of the world. Only within the past month had the ban been lifted. The prison was clean once more, and letters were allowed to be sent from it to the anxious folk who were interested in the survivors.

One man had written to his wife that he expected to be released on the 10th of October at eight o'clock in the morning. He wrote rather despairingly, since he had not received a single line from her during the whole dreadful period of horror. Yet she might have written for all of that. There had been weeks when the incoming letters were dealt with by anybody fit to cope with the task, and any number of them might have miscarried, or even been destroyed during a mania for wholesale destruction, which reached its height when the fumigating process began. The man remembered well the huge bonfire wherein had perished the entire contents of the prison library. He had helped to burn those books himself.

And he had written to his wife as soon as they would let him, not knowing where she was or how she fared, to say that he prayed God his name had not gone out to her as one numbered among the dead, for a dreadful experience had been his.

It was over now, and he could speak of it. The plague had caught and left him all but lifeless, and after a night of coma he came to himself among the bodies in the quick-lime pit. Men like skeletons, nearly as lifeless as he, were listlessly shoveling earth over them. One saw him stir, and reached down a hand to help him crawl out of that hole of death back to the land of the living.

He wrote also that he was feeling quite well now, but perhaps she would find him slightly changed, as the new prison doctor—rules having been greatly relaxed—had given him permission to grow a beard because of throat weakness. He was one of the elect who had survived, and Quentin did not want to add to its toll through a little thing like pneumonia or pleurisy.

Witcham was a sufficiently small place,

notwithstanding its manufacturing importance, to insure that letter being delivered, and at eight o'clock that morning the man with his small satchel of belongings and the few shillings he had earned left the prison with high hope in his heart.

The great gates clanged to behind him and he stood there for a few moments blinking in the dazzling sunshine, loath to admit the cruel disappointment.

Amy had not come, and by that fact Dick Marshall knew that either she had not received his letter or something had happened to her. All this long time he had cherished in his heart the memory of her brave farewell to him. Their love was their shield—an invincible shield against which the lance of misfortune must break.

He began a slow descent of the road which led to the station. There was enough money in his pocket, and a little more, to take him to Witcham.

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE STRANGER.

THE train was late, and so Dick Marshall missed his connection at the junction, where he was obliged to wait six weary hours for the afternoon express. Dusk was settling over Witcham when finally he alighted at the familiar station.

Passing a man of his acquaintance, he was not recognized, and a mingled feeling of pride and sensitiveness forbade him to make himself known. For the moment he forgot his beard, and of course he did not know that every one believed him to have been dead of the plague these many months. No one in Witcham was expecting to see him, and this pallid, bearded ghost with the stooped shoulders and dragging step of an old man had nothing in common with the gay-hearted Dick Marshall of other days.

Catching sight of his reflection in a shop window, he realized that even Amy might fail to recognize him at first sight. A dread settled upon him as he climbed Mount Street with his little satchel. So many things could have happened to her while

he had languished in that death-trap. But he dared not let himself fear that she was dead, and his faith in her love touched the sublime.

There were kind people in Witcham who would not have allowed her to starve, however much they might blame him. He thought of the little baby she had been expecting, and wondered if it were safe. Poor Amy—she had been so alone through this long trial!

He went up the steps to the gate of the terraced cottage. There were different curtains at the windows, from one of which a strange child's face peered out at him. With a heavy heart he raised the knocker.

The child came to the door—a little girl of about eleven.

"Does Mrs. Marshall live here?" Dick asked.

He knew at once that she did not; the furniture seen dimly behind the child was different—but he had to ask. Perhaps they would be able to tell him where Amy was. The little girl shook her head, her finger in her mouth.

A woman sitting by the stove bathing a smaller child called out to her sharply to shut the door, but immediately she turned, and catching sight of Dick remembered her manners.

"Come in, sir, if you please. The draft's very strong, and I don't want this one to catch another cold. But if you're selling anything—"

"Thank you," Dick said, hastily availing himself of the invitation to enter. "I only wanted to find out the address of some one who used to live here."

The homely interior, familiar yet strange, struck him with a pang of homesickness.

"A clerk at Tremlett's, name of Marshall, lived here before us," the woman volunteered as she wrapped her dripping infant in a warm strip of blanket. "I don't know who had it before."

Dick cleared his throat. "It's the Marshalls I'm inquiring about," he said with an effort. "Can you tell me where they—where Mrs. Marshall has moved to?"

"La! You must be a stranger, sir!"

"I am," he replied. Never had anything seemed truer.

"Well, sir, it was rather a shocking story. I hope they weren't particular friends of yours? Perhaps they owed you money. They owed so many people."

"No, I—I just want to find Mrs. Marshall. It's a personal matter."

"She isn't Mrs. Marshall any more, sir," the woman said with a sour little laugh. "She didn't lose any time, either. Her husband was sent to prison for robbing his employer. Some say they don't believe he did it, but it doesn't do him any good now what anybody thinks. He died of the plague at Quentin."

"Did he?" Dick asked grimly. "And his wife?"

"Oh, he hadn't been dead more'n two or three months before she married Mr. Tremlett—him that her husband robbed."

The visitor sank down onto a chair, his elbows resting on the kitchen table, his face hidden in his hands.

"Oh, no!" he cried, his voice muffled yet betraying a sharp note of anguish.

"I'm sorry, sir. Yes, it's the truth, and I don't wonder you're shocked. It's a living scandal, isn't it? And they do say she's changed a lot. I've only seen her myself driving about in her motor-car. Peter Tremlett's had his house all done up new. My husband is a painter, and he did some work there. He says nothing like it has ever been seen in Witcham."

The man was suddenly shaken by a coughing and shivering fit. He was like a bag of rattling bones. When he recovered he managed to get to his feet and thank the woman for her information. Then with a gesture of despair he made a dramatic exit.

The woman ran to the window with the child in her arms to peer out after him.

"Now, what do you suppose he wanted, Lily?" she demanded of the little girl. "He was a queer one, all right. It took him all of a heap when I told him Mrs. Marshall was married again."

The little girl had no answer to the riddle. "I dunno," she said.

Dick went on down the street and presently found himself in the brilliantly lighted High. It was a Saturday evening, and all the shops were going full blast. He

turned in at a public-house, a rather notorious place which in other days he would have scorned to enter. The bar parlor was crowded with a mixed mass of humanity, and a bold-eyed girl of common appearance edged up to him with a laugh.

"Just come from your rich uncle's funeral?" she asked. "Guess he didn't leave you anything, but if you've got the price of two beers on you I'll go shares with you. I'm that thirsty me tongue's hanging out."

She ordered the drinks herself, and Dick paid for them mechanically. He scarcely knew where he was or what he was doing. Never once did he speak to the girl, and presently, after stealing several glances at his set, white face, she became a little frightened and slipped away.

"That one's headed for the crazy-house," she confided to a friend.

It must have been nine o'clock before Dick picked up his small bag of belongings and left the public-house. He crossed the big open park where the breeze blew fresh and keen from the river and thence on by way of the bridge to Witcham Mere.

No one had recognized him, for he had not happened to run into any one with whom he was intimately acquainted. Nevertheless he had created an atmosphere of mystery and interest about himself. Tomorrow all Witcham would know of this stranger who had flitted like a ghost through the town after inquiring for Mrs. Marshall at the cottage in Mount Street.

CHAPTER XXIV.

ELSPETH MAKES A DISCOVERY.

PETER TREMLETT was giving a private dinner-party to-night to celebrate his election as mayor of Witcham. The councillors and their wives were coming and a few other people of importance in the community.

Tremlett had not been able to revert to his former frugal habits. The thing was simply impossible, made doubly so by the fact that he himself was being subtly enslaved by a love of luxury.

And Amy—he would scarcely have be-

lieved it possible for a woman to change to such an extent since becoming his wife. What could have happened to her during those three weeks in London?

He had expected to be happy, but this woman he had married was not the Amy Marshall of his dreams. He had her; she had come to his arms almost too readily; yet even in this short time there were moments when he regretted the thing he had done which had resulted in its being possible for her to become his wife.

There were times when her strangeness terrified him. It was as though an evil spirit triumphed in her and watched him maliciously from the gray eyes, to see what he made of her.

A great tragedy had befallen Loraine Drew. She had hoped to leave temptation behind her when she stepped into Amy's shoes, but it had followed her to Witcham. With plenty of money at her command she was able to send to London for the drug which had conquered her.

At first she honestly persuaded herself that it was only for a little while, until she had turned this dangerous corner and arrived into the fair security of her new surroundings. The fact that the real Amy had been seriously ill of brain fever helped Loraine to pass off many of her own lapses. It was easy enough to persuade Dr. Leach into believing that her memory for names and faces had become slightly impaired.

But really Loraine had made few mistakes. Her greatest difficulty was with Elspeth. Elspeth was not merely puzzled; she was suspicious, but she kept her thoughts to herself. A time was coming, however, when she would be obliged to speak them aloud.

In Peter's household his wife had created something of a sensation. She knew such a lot that Dorcas would never have believed Amy could know. She revised the wine cellar and displayed an astonishing taste for vintage champagne. She demanded dishes which the cook had never heard of, and scarcely ever was she to be seen without a cigaret between her lips. She jeered at Witcham society and begged Peter to take a house in London.

"She's like a snake, crushing the life

out of him," Dorcas confided in a quavering whisper to Mrs. Dundas.

Aunt Anna had at first received Loraine with open arms, but the latter, repulsing her advances, she had altered her will again, cutting "Amy" out of it once more. Elspeth, who knew of this, heaved a sigh of relief. Elspeth, for most excellent if somewhat complicated reasons, did not want that fortune to go to Mrs. Peter Tremlett. Yes, Elspeth was puzzled and very, very suspicious.

"If only," she muttered to herself, "I could get a good squint at the middle of her back, then I'd *know*."

But on ordinary occasions Mrs. Peter Tremlett's back was not on view, and so Elspeth had no means of finding out whether or not the identifying brown mole, "like a thrippenny bit," was still where it should be. Elspeth had bathed Amy as a child, and she knew exactly where that little brown patch had imprinted itself.

Mrs. Dundas was one of those invited to the festive dinner-party, and she made no objections when Elspeth asked to be allowed to accompany her. Naturally she wished to look her best, for her supposed niece was setting a pace which Witcham had some difficulty in following, and Elspeth could be depended upon to put her mistress's "false front" right at the last moment, and see that nothing was amiss with the rest of her toilette. Besides, Mrs. Dundas had heard it rumored that in London ladies of fashion often went to parties attended by their maids. She thought it rather clever of Elspeth to think of offering to accompany her.

Elspeth's motive, however, had not been to impress the ladies of Witcham with her mistress's fashionable ways. She had heard, through the back-stairs medium, that Mrs. Peter Tremlett was going to wear a really shocking dress.

"Comes right down to her waist at the back," said Elspeth's informant. "And what there is of it is only spangles."

Could anything have been less like Amy!

Peter came into his wife's room about ten minutes before it was necessary for them to go down to receive their guests. He had

made his success in spite of her—in spite even of the fact that people had been shocked by their sudden marriage.

He stood in the doorway for a moment, glowering at her.

She sat before her dressing-table adding certain finishing touches. Her face was dead white, her lips scarlet. The short mass of fluffy hair had been frizzed and then combed out with startling effect. The dress, rumors of which had reached Elspeth, was a French confection of black sequins, and Peter would find that it had cost him something like eighty pounds. It fitted her slim body as a sheath and was sleeveless.

He was compelled against his will to admire her beauty, but it was the sort of beauty which looks more naturally placed behind the footlights.

A cigaret burned on the edge of the dressing-table and close at hand stood an empty glass. The woman's eyes were brilliant as she turned to him.

"I'm just ready," she said.

He had meant to tell her that she must put a shawl over her bare shoulders and take some of the red off her lips, but in such matters Loraine was armored with conscious rectitude. If Witcham objected to the way she got herself up, it was simply because Witcham did not know anything, and jolly well time it was taught. Already some of the younger matrons were learning. Under her frank smile the intended scolding died on his lips. He went further than Dorcas; his own private description of his wife likened her to a vampire. Not only was she eating her way steadily into his money, but she was draining the very life of him by her mysteriousness.

There were days when she was sunk in white-faced apathy and scarcely seemed to hear if spoken to; days when she retired to her room exhausted by illness which Dr. Leach could not define; at other times she was so gay that the sound of her laughter jarred every nerve in Peter's body.

"Don't I look nice?" she demanded, springing to her feet. "Isn't this frock a dream?"

Peter shrugged his shoulders, and she struck him playfully with her fan.

"You old silly! Wake up. Say some-

thing pleasant to your wife. No, no—don't kiss me. It 'll come off."

He offered his arm stiffly, and she took it with a gurgling laugh.

"Do we have to go down like this? How grand! 'Enter the duke and the duchess.' Oh, I shall go mad, *mad!* Why did I ever—"

This was one of her uncanny moods which he dreaded. When they were on her he always expected her to speak of Dick Marshall, to throw it up to him that she was a changed creature because he had murdered her first husband and compelled her to marry him. But she never mentioned Dick. Often he wished that she would. Sometimes it seemed that he himself would be forced to drag that skeleton into the light of day, since she refused to do so. Down the broad staircase they went together.

Mrs. Dundas had arrived early and was removing her wraps in a room allotted for that purpose, when suddenly a housemaid appeared and winked hurriedly at Elspeth.

"If you want to see her—" she whispered *sotto voce*.

Elspeth left her mistress without ceremony and flew to the head of the stairs. She had a very good view indeed of Mrs. Peter Tremlett's back, and there wasn't the vestige of a brown mole to be seen on the slimly white expanse.

"I knew it!" she muttered to herself, "She's not Miss Amy." She was still muttering when she returned to assist Mrs. Dundas. The latter reproved her.

"Why did you go away like that?"

"I only wanted to see Mrs. Tremlett, ma'am," Elspeth replied meekly. "Emily said she was wearing such a wonderful dress as I wouldn't believe."

"Humph!" ejaculated Aunt Anna.

CHAPTER XXV.

A CURSE UPON THE TREMLETTs.

NEVER in the annals of Witcam had anything equaled the magnificence of Mr. and Mrs. Tremlett's dinner-party that night. Altogether it was an unqualified success. The staid old councillors

were charmed by Mrs. Tremlett's wit and cheered by the fare she had ordered for their delectation. Their wives were dazzled. Aunt Anna wondered how long the money would last at this pace, and where Peter Tremlett would end. She thought she could name the place. Rumor had it that Tremlett's mills were in a bad way; but of course Peter knew his own business best, and it was unlikely all his eggs were in the one basket.

Twenty strong, the guests sat at a table which fairly glittered and groaned under its wealth of sparkling glass and silver plate. The massed arrangement of fruit, flowers and candles was perfect. Having no need to regard expense, Loraine could give full rein to her luxurious tastes.

After dinner there was music.

Aunt Anna was genuinely puzzled by the proficiency her niece had attained, and forced to give a grudging admiration, while at the same time there was something about Mrs. Peter Tremlett that she hated.

The night was warm for October, and the drawing-room windows had been left open so that Peter's guests could enjoy the fairy sight of the Japanese garden all lit up with lanterns.

His mood toward his wife had changed for the moment. He was proud of her, and her strange, baffling beauty made its usual appeal to his senses. He was looking forward to the time when everybody should have gone and left him alone with her. Perhaps to-night he could bring himself to break that long silence regarding Dick Marshall; get her to acknowledge that she was happier here than ever she could have been in that poky little cottage in Mount Street.

Witcam kept early hours, and as the hands of the clock passed ten the councillors' wives began a tentative process of taking leave. They were dazzled by Mrs. Tremlett and her smart ways, but rather shy of her. Finally they had all gone, and Dorcas immediately retired to her own room.

The Japanese garden was still illuminated. Peter made a move to turn off the lights which were controlled by a switch in the hall, but his wife begged him not to for a little while.

She went up-stairs ostensibly to change the sequined frock for something less weighty, but when she came down again not only had she changed her frock, but her manner had altered. Her face was so white that her gray eyes looked almost black by contrast, and her lips were twisted in that insolent smile which Peter feared and hated.

"Amy," he said, catching her by the shoulders, "do you take drugs?"

It was an unexpected challenge and had come to Peter Tremlett by sheer inspiration alone. He lacked any former experience to guide him.

She laughed in his face.

"Don't be a fool. I'm tired, if you must know. Sometimes I take a little—a little veronal to stave off a headache. Peter, be an angel and open a bottle of fizz."

He moved reluctantly to do her bidding, and while he was out of the room Loraine stretched herself on a couch, yawning delicately.

"That was a near shave," she muttered to herself. "Wonder what put the idea into his head?"

She looked lovely in her mysterious and rather sinister fashion as she lay on the couch, her arms raised above her head with the sleeves falling away from them. The gown itself was everything the heart of a sophisticated woman could desire, a dream frock of white lace and velvet and heavy bands of chinchilla fur.

Peter Tremlett came back with a tray. He had brought two glasses, one for himself as well as one for her. He placed it on a table beside the couch and sat on a big, stuffed cushion close to his wife. She begged for a cigaret and he humored her. She lay with half-closed eyes, looking out into the garden, and Tremlett touched one of her bare arms, caressing it softly.

Why, he wondered, did he love and hate her at the same time? Assuredly she was not the Amy of his dreams, but the fascination of her stole away his senses.

"The garden is wonderful!" she exclaimed. "I wish it were really Japan."

He bent down and kissed her arm.

"Are you happy, Amy?"

She shook her head. "I wasn't meant to be happy," she replied.

Now, if ever, was the moment for him to lay that ghost. But before he could think how to introduce the ugly subject, his wife gave a little cry and raised herself on one elbow.

"Peter, there's some one out there watching us—a man! Heavens! Where has he got to now?"

"Nonsense!"

"But I tell you I saw as clearly as anything. A dreadful face—as though he wanted to kill me. He looked straight into my eyes."

Peter got up, and as he did so a tall form sprang into the window framed against the background of softly lighted garden—the form of a man, gaunt and bearded, with eyes staring like a madman's.

"The curse of God be on you both!" he cried hoarsely. "May He be as merciful to you as you have been to me."

And then the form vanished, melting into the velvety darkness as a shadow among shadows. He was gone.

Loraine's teeth were chattering and she clung to her husband.

"Peter, rouse the servants. He must be an escaped lunatic. Oh, did you hear what he said? Poor creature! But I'm terribly afraid. He might come back."

Half frozen with the terrifying surprise of it, Tremlett stared at his wife. Was it possible that Amy hadn't recognized the fellow? Peter himself had seen under the disguise of beard and the appearance of premature age—he had seen that ghost in the living flesh, Dick Marshall; and he had been cursed.

His wife's entreaties made an effect upon him at last. He closed and locked the windows and drew the curtains. The lights in the garden were switched off. But he did not call the servants or make a search for the intruder.

"I think you ought to ring up the police," Loraine implored.

Tremlett shook his head. He wondered at her. Was she acting? Was it possible she hadn't known?

"Peter, it isn't right to let a man like that be at large, prowling about. Perhaps he's one of your men with a grudge against you."

Near the mark, that! Too near to be anything but accidental.

"Yes," he said. "I think I know who the fellow is. You've met him, Amy."

"Have I? Where? When?"

Tremlett could not control a sneer.

"You've got a short memory, my dear."

Loraine shrugged her shoulders. "I'm afraid I have, when it comes to faces. Did I meet him that day you took me over the mills?"

"Long before that," her husband said. "However, it doesn't matter."

"But he's angry with you, and certainly the man is not in his right mind. You ought to protect yourself. Did you discharge him for something?"

"For stealing," Peter said, testing her again. Surely that would jog her memory.

It did to a certain extent. She remembered what Amy had told her about Dick, the man who was supposed to have been her first husband. She had never been able to refer to him with any appearance of sincerity. Somehow it didn't seem quite fair to Amy, to whom he had been everything in the world, and who had lost him.

"Perhaps he was unjustly accused," Loraine said. "Just as—as Dick was."

She was not altogether sure of her ground here, having only Amy's word for it that Dick Marshall had been innocent. Naturally Amy would believe that he was.

Tremlett did not answer. He was convinced now that his wife had not recognized Dick.

The next morning he began to wonder if he himself had been fooled by his guilty conscience into fancying a resemblance to a man who must be dead.

He who had stepped out of the shadows of the garden for a few seconds to utter that curse was bearded and might well be middle-aged.

Loraine brought up the subject again at breakfast, retailing the dramatic incident to Dorcas, while Peter screened his face with the newspaper. Presently he rose and went into his study, locking the door behind him, but scarcely had he picked up the telephone when he put it back again. He could not ring up Quentin Prison from Witcham and ask the question he must have answered. The ears of Exchange had figured in a local lawsuit on an occasion quite recently.

Across country it was but fifty miles to Quentin. Tremlett ordered his car, and told the chauffeur to drive him to the prison. Quite reasonably the big mill-owner and mayor of Witcham might have business with the governor of Quentin, although so far there had never been any personal intercourse between them. Tremlett was thankful to remember that the local papers had kindly refrained from referring to the fact when noticing his marriage that his bride was the widow of a man who had but recently died in prison.

It was nearly dinner-time before he got back to Witcham. The question was answered.

Richard Marshall, falsely reported as dead during that period of unspeakable chaos and terror, had been released from Quentin yesterday morning.

There was no doubt now in Tremlett's mind as to the identity of the man who had appeared so mysteriously to call down a curse upon him and Amy.

(To be continued NEXT WEEK.)



Watch for the start of another new serial by one of your favorites

MAX BRAND

He has again taken the West for his stamping ground, and you will find spirited action a-plenty in "Gun Gentlemen," which will begin in one of next month's issues.

The Kiss Taboo



by *George M. A. Cain*

EVERYBODY agreed that Dascomb was the most contrary of mortals. His own mother used to say of him that, if you really wanted Richard to do something promptly and earnestly, it was necessary only to tell him not to do it; and that the only reason she did not adopt this easy method of getting her will of him was that, having done what was forbidden, the poor kid was so sorry for his offense it broke her heart to see him.

Back in the States they could account for his very clothes by his contrariness. He bought brown pants because his sister said he should buy gray ones; a green hat because his brother recommended a black one; black shoes because the clerk tried to sell him tan ones. Wearing the things after he got them was penance enough.

But his worst offense, previous to his Uncle John's demise, was the cute little mustache which adorned his upper lip. Jessie Duncan, with all a fiancée's right to object, objected with all her might. She kept on objecting so fast he never got around to the repentance.

Out of the extreme west that is the Far East came news of Uncle John's death. Everybody had supposed Uncle John had drowned a generation ago. He hadn't. Sufficiently on the contrary to be his nephew's own uncle, he had lived and got rich. The firm of attorneys in the Gilbert Islands informed Richard Dascomb, Esq.,

that he was the sole heir to an island by the last will and testament of the deceased.

The rest of the family decided that Uncle John must have selected his heir by putting into a hat the names of all his known relatives and getting a blindfolded kid to draw one out. Contrariwise, Richard decided that Uncle John had, in some mysterious fashion, kept track of him and picked him as the only sufficiently able member of the tribe to manage an island.

His contrariness was abetted by the family assurance that he was a fool not to accept the offer the Gilbert Island lawyers said they had from a client of their representative, Mr. Joshua Kitters, of the Island of Kilaue, neighbor at only forty miles distance from Richard's new possession. Mr. Kitters's client was willing to pay a hundred thousand dollars for the island.

And the family and Jessie Duncan told him he couldn't possibly do a thing with an island; he couldn't tell whether it was worth ten dollars or a million. And he went. All told they had got his back up so far that he didn't even repent about the mustache all the way out. He still had it, when he picked up Mr. Joshua Kitters on Kilaue, and took that cross between a trader and a lawyer on to his own isle of Mangue.

Kitters had shown him all over the island and the big tin palace his uncle had built and the books and the stock of his uncle's

trade. The fellow had lost no opportunity to indicate that a hundred thousand was a wonderful price for the outfit. They were taking their last walk, and Kitters was doing his last arguing, and Dascomb was doing his last resisting, when—

"Gee!" Richard exclaimed. "There's the first girl I've seen that looks as if her beau could kiss her with his eyes open."

Kitters stared at the girl. It probably occurred to his memory that the late John Dascomb had married a native girl and settled down on Mangue for thirty years. He did not wish John Dascomb's nephew to settle there for thirty days. It might interfere with his purchase for his client.

"Whoever kisses her had better keep his eyes open," said Kitters. "Don't you see the taboo sign on her?"

"Huh?" queried Dascomb, in a snort of opposition.

"One of Chief Huali-m'uali's girls," the trader-lawyer elucidated. "See the white blossoms in the wreath on her head? Taboo sign! The chief has marked her for his own. If he doesn't forget, he'll make her wife number a hundred and something in due time. Meanwhile and forever, she's taboo. Any tender-hearted youth who makes cow-eyes at her is due for plague or cholera. One kiss on those lovely, purple-brown lips is surer hell-before-midnight than plain suicide."

"Bah!" barked Dascomb; and, before Kitters could stop him, he had stepped up to the surprised brown lady and, as she stared wonderingly up at him, planted a smack upon her half-opened mouth.

The girl giggled. Dascomb came back wiping his lips to Kitters.

"Ugh!" he shuddered. "What was it?"

"You've done it now. I told you she was taboo," snapped his guide.

"The deuce with the taboo. But that smell!" cried Dascomb. "It's enough to give you cholera and plague together."

"That's only coco-oil; and it makes their hair shine," Kitters explained. "But the taboo is something else. It's the chief's law in the island. And he enforces it."

"Give me cholera, eh?" Dascomb snorted again.

"If he happens to give you a mess of

boiled rice with slivers of bamboo run into the grains, you'd better have cholera. It's as good for the system as ground glass."

"Bah!" Dascomb snorted once more.

They had come down the day before from Kilaue on the Empress of China. The steamer had gone on to the next island, some fifteen miles nearer than Kilaue, in the opposite direction. An Englishman had a big trading station there, Kitters informed his none too trusting client. The Empress of China's smoke showed on the horizon. Kitters got into a boat and was rowed out to meet her.

And Dascomb began to repent. He hadn't trusted Kitters. He hadn't liked the man. He still had a feeling that the lawyer was trying to put something over with that offer of a hundred thousand. In parting Kitters mentioned that a good launch could reach Kilaue in decent weather. If trouble appeared, Dascomb could send a message to him and he would come in a hurry. Otherwise he would come in a month or so, when Dascomb had found out whether the island was worth more to him than the price.

Dascomb determined that it would be a month or so. But, as he saw the other white man's face fade into the distance, as he realized that he was alone with just one old native who could manage even a word of English—he began to repent. If Chief Huali-m'uali hadn't come up at that moment, bowing and grinning like a fawning dog, and, through the interpreter and majordomo of the tin palace, expressed a wish to adopt the white man as his son, Dascomb might have started then and there to follow the Empress of China in a proa all the way to Kilaue. As it was, he didn't send for Kitters until midnight.

The adoption ceremony demanded a dinner. It was held up on the chief's *patae* under the open roof. It was a stag affair, accompanied with a cabaret of mysterious dances. And the chief kept grinning all through it. Since Uncle John's own cook had prepared the meal it was to the king's taste—and Dascomb's. He ate heartily. Then he stopped eating.

The chief grinned right on. But Dascomb could not eat. He could only think

of what he had eaten. Chinese chicken chow mein—with rice; pork chop suey—with rice; Indian curry sauce—on rice.

And there, protruding from the end of a grain he had missed on his plate, a tiny point was barely visible! Dascomb felt faint. He decided it was a preliminary symptom.

The tin palace contained a medicine closet. It opened with a combination lock. The combination was all written out right on its side. That was just another of the queer features of the place. Dascomb looked over the outfit. He decided on castor oil. The oil might heal the pricks of the bamboo slivers. He took a heroic dose.

At midnight, racked with cramps, he bade Duano—the pidgin-English speaking majordomo—send the fastest boatmen of the island for the white man. He opened a bottle of brandy and stilled the pain. There was no special object in dying in any more agony than was necessary.

He woke up quite well. It was ten o'clock of the morning. He called for Duano. He called again. He felt too good to lie in bed. He laughed at realization that, instead of saving himself from poisoning, he had probably poisoned himself with medicine. He got up and went in search of the chief servant.

Sprawled across the entrance to the big general living-room of the tin palace lay the fellow, the emptied bottle beside him. Dascomb did not feel so good. The chief servant couldn't even talk baby talk. And here came the chief of the island, old Huali-m'uali himself, and, hanging a little behind him out of maiden shyness—the tabooed girl!

Dascomb repented of ever having seen her. It seemed that his repentance was coming at its usual time—too late. The chief had prepared some hideous punishment. He still grinned. It had occurred to Dascomb last night, as he looked up from the pointed grain of rice at that grinning face, that the spider probably had grinned when the fly accepted the invitation into her parlor. The same thought recurred to him now—

The chief made a sweeping gesture. There was no mistaking it and the grin

taken together. He was making a present. The taboo girl was being offered in wedlock.

And Dascomb made a sweeping gesture. There was no mistaking the shock on his face. He didn't want the present. The present looked puzzled, not a little crest-fallen. The chief's grin deserted him for a moment. He, too, was puzzled and offended.

A bright thought came to Dascomb. He ran back to the bedroom. From the bureau he tenderly lifted a framed photograph. He took it out to the plainly disgruntled chief and the plainly disappointed wife the chief had planned to part with. He hoped he made them understand that he wanted only one wife, and that the photograph pictured the one.

He saw, however, that they were far from satisfied. He offered the chief a fragrant-looking old pipe of his uncle's from the rack on the wall. The chief refused the present. Chief and wife went off together, chattering violently.

Dascomb's repentance went on apace. He had offended the wife and the chief. What could he do about it? More to the point, what would they do about it?

Natures like Dascomb's stand trouble better than waiting for it and wondering what it is going to be. In an hour he wished old Huali-m'uali would come on and begin his worst. In another hour his dinner was served. The steam of it, rising from under a cover, gave him a surprising hunger. The look of it took the hunger away. It was a casserole dish—of rice.

Then his wish came true—and the chief again. His highness marched down the hill to the tin palace on the beach, like a general at the head of an army. Beside him were six of the island braves. Beside each of the braves dangled a sword.

Then came women—it suddenly dawned on Dascomb that Huali-m'uali had been improving the time since Uncle John's demise, to possess himself of all the women-folk in the island. He tried to recall when he had seen a native woman without white flowers in her hair. He couldn't remember one. And, if the island held more women than he now saw white-wreathed, its female

population must vastly exceed the males. Further, behind the wives of Huali-m'uali marched the rest of the island people, and they were all men.

Fifty yards back of the tin palace the chief paused. With much directing and arranging, he got a formation to suit him. The women were lined up in one long row. They stretched for half a thousand yards. They all wore red calico slips of dresses. Siegfried never put on a revue like it in his life.

The rest of the island population draped itself as comfortably as possible in the rear. The ladies remained standing until the chief's back was turned. Then some very old ones and a dozen or two with rather heavy babies at their breasts, sat down slyly.

The chief and his half-dozen attendant braves marched then upon the tin palace. The grin was turned on full once more; but there was a determination about the step which worried the prospective host. If there hadn't been so many open windows, Dascomb would have barricaded his doors. If he had been sure he could get far in any direction, he would have run. There was nothing to do but to face the music and the chief.

At least there was room for some parleying—if there had been any way to parley. The chief bowed and smiled with that fawning-dog grin on his face. There was to be diplomacy before force.

And Dascomb could play for delay. He pointed to the still inebriated Duano; he pointed to his own lips and said a long sentence in English. The chief looked at Duano. He looked at the empty bottle. He picked that up and made sure of its emptiness.

Another happy thought. Dascomb got to the medicine chest. There was still one bottle of brandy left. He drew it out, set it on a table, gestured toward his unwanted guest. The chief held the bottle while one of his braves knocked its top off with his sword. He shouldn't have feared bamboo-slivers to judge by his indifference to glass. With his mouth over the jagged edge of the bottle's neck, his head tilted upward, he grinned and grinned. With nearly a third

of its contents drained, he set it down and then himself. He motioned to his braves to take the rest. They made quick work of it.

In ten minutes Dascomb could see his mistake. Instead of seven sober enemies, he had seven drunk ones. They were passing through rapid stages of hilarity toward quarrelsomeness. Only the old chief sat still. The grin grew weaker, and ceased to be a grin at all, giving place to a blank stare. He almost went to sleep.

But not quite. He seemed to rouse to what was happening to him. He recalled that he had business to transact. He began to talk. The fact that Dascomb could not understand irritated him. He got up, supporting himself with a hand on the table. He looked a minute at Duano. Then he spoke to his braves.

The hapless servant was dragged from the palace and down the beach. His captors ducked him again and again. But they were all out of sight, out of mind, with the chief. Huali-m'uali addressed himself once more to the task of making Dascomb understand something. He pointed out of the windows at the long row of assorted femininity. He talked loud and fast. He pursed his lips and produced a strange clicking sound again and again.

Dascomb guessed that he was trying to reproduce the sound of a kiss. He knew the rest. He had been too familiar with the tabooed fiancée; the old chief had been generous enough to offer to part with her in the white man's behalf; but that offer had been rejected, leaving the woman still a fiancée and an insulted one. And Chief Huali-m'uali was going to get some sort of apology out of the white man in their presence, or the white man would serve as an exhibition of the way his majesty felt toward any one who got fresh with his women-folk. Dascomb wished he were surer of the alternative apology.

The old man grew drunkenly more insistent. He pulled on Dascomb's shoulder. He talked loud and harshly. He gesticulated more violently.

Dascomb thought of using force to put the fellow out of his house. He even thought of killing the old rascal there and

then. The six braves, dragging the half-drowned Duano back to the palace, were six excellent reasons for respecting majesty; also the certainty that they were but officers whose men would gather from behind that ungodly row of women at a word.

Duano was sadly sober now—sober and sad enough to use his wits to their utmost at the command of any one. The chief seized him, shook him roughly, began to talk to him.

"Chief say Missah Dassum make nice how-do for one womans."

"Huh?" Dascomb roared at him for more lucid talk than that. "Me no savvy."

"One woman, Missah Dassum make how-do like—" and Duano managed a resounding smack.

"Oh!" The vowel sounded like something deflating.

"Much nice how-do—womans she like plenty. Chief say plenty good. You like wifey. He bring womans. You no like. Then him savvy. You got new, nice how-do for womans. All womans like how-do allee-same like one womans."

The blear-eyed chief was watching every gesture, his glance traveling swiftly from speaker to hearer. He seemed to sense that his general meaning was being properly interpreted. He nodded vigorously, and worked his half-paralyzed facial muscles to reproduce his grin.

And Dascomb was getting it. He had displayed favoritism. It had been all right, had he been thereby indicating choice of a wife for himself. Now it was all wrong. It was more wrong than he supposed. Duano was going on to explain that the kissed lady was of much inferior rank to many who might have been kissed.

"Me sorry," he apologized with genuine humility.

The chief grinned some more. He assured Dascomb there was nothing at all to be sorry about. The lady had liked the new greeting. All the other ladies were eager to be greeted. And he, their rightful protector from all unfairness and injustice, was there to see that they were greeted.

Yes, it was just that for Dascomb. The more he tried to excuse himself, the clearer

it got that excuses were of no avail; when he said outright that he couldn't do it, it was indicated that six men were here and twenty times six outside, willing and anxious to render all assistance needed to make it possible for him to square things with the slighted ladies.

Dascomb realized that he would come off better with less force than with more. He gave one groan and one despairing glance toward Kilaue and a sea unmarked by sign of white man's vessel hastening to the rescue. Kitters ought to have got there. He could have had the island as a gift.

As Dascomb went out of that great room of many uses, he came almost face to face with a full-length mirror. He saw only one thing in it. It was the cute little mustache he wore because Jessie Duncan said he mustn't. He repented of that mustache. Like all his other repentences, it was too late.

The ladies braced themselves to attention at his appearance. He headed toward the middle of the line. He balked. Squarely in front of him sat an enormous creature who seemed in danger of bursting a dress made of more full-width gores than Dascomb could count. She was chewing beetle nut. The brilliant juice had not quite cleared her numerous chins. A trickling stream of it dripped from her ample bosom.

But he was to have time to brace himself for that. He was led to the end of the line. An ancient dame, her monkey face a mass of wrinkles, removed a blackened clay pipe from her lips and tucked its stem through the earring holes in the lobes of her ears, before she raised her expectant grin. Dascomb gulped. Then he did it.

The old lady sighed with relief. The next was fat and forty. She wiped her lips with the back of a grimy hand, and held them up. And Dascomb gulped—and did it. She giggled and wiped her lips again.

The next was a sad-eyed creature who smiled at him through misty tears. He should have been glad to bring the smile, if he hadn't tasted the tear. He looked back and counted—one, two, three. Slightly over one per cent of his job was done.

He went on. By the time he had kissed ten of them he was definitely settled in his mind that kisses would never be the same to him again. With the twentieth attended to, he was sure he would never be the same to kiss again.

He tried to keep his lips away from the brown-blue mouths held up to him; he was convinced that it was the tickle of that infernal mustache which made the appeal. He brushed the twenty-third pair of lips quite daintily. He barely dodged a sneeze which must have blown him out to sea.

He hurried over a score or so more. He was growing sick with the smell of coco-oil, with the look of the brown faces and the thick lips—with the taste of some of the kisses. He looked hopefully ahead, then hopelessly back. He seemed but to have made a fair start.

Then he remembered the lady in the middle of the line. He quit hurrying. A woman as fat as that might die any time of heart disease. If he took long enough—but he knew she would live.

Many of the faces were adorned with paint. The effect was not exactly enhancing to the kisses. It was hard to decide between a sky-blue upper lip or a yellow lower one, or between a right cheek with a white circle on it nicely adorned by a black spiral line, and a red cheek set off with green checkers. But paint was not so soul-racking as some other things.

The ladies who removed moist-ended cigar butts from their lips; the ones who were caught at just the wrong timing on the salivary operations connected with beetle-nut chewing; the ones who got an erroneous idea of their part of the task and sputtered instead of smacking—and the fat one—he was coming to her. He couldn't keep on kissing down that line without coming to her. Perhaps it was well he had noticed her. The mere prospect of doing his duty in the salute line by her rendered him oblivious to a lot of highly unkissable features preceding her. And she kept herself in view. She was mightily interested in this new thing.

The chief and his braves followed right along. They were obviously as tickled as the ladies. They fairly gurgled with joy

over the novelty. And they saw that the performance was properly attended to in each instance. There was no escaping any one. The fat lady—Dascomb was but three pairs of lips away from her. He lingered over the preliminaries, he wiped his mouth more slowly than heretofore. He got out his handkerchief and mopped his mustache. But the third kiss from the fat lady was finished—and only two remained.

And then—there was only one. Then—

Dascomb straightened himself slowly—that last one before the supremely awful one was a short dame. He left her regretfully, sorrowfully, almost tearfully. With downcast eyes he moved on. He reached the point diametrically in front of the vast but tight-fitting skirt.

He raised his eyes. He must try to find the point of least resistance on that great expanse of fat face—the spot his mustache might touch with least revulsion to his stomach. He looked her face over. It was beaded with perspiration, in addition to the beads which were its eyes.

He drew a long breath. And then the unexpected happened. Action gave meaning to that gaping void of face.

The great lips parted in a vermillion-wet scream of ungodly terror. The great creature threw herself backward upon the ground, and started to roll. She rolled around Dascomb. There was one woman in Mangue who, when it came to the point, did not want to be kissed!

The six braves leaped at the human barrel. It bounced to its feet. Yelling and shrieking it headed for the beach. The swiftest of the young men managed to get in its way. Then he got out of its way. He seemed to feel as the German soldiers felt about the first tank the English sprang on them.

She plunged into the water. Waist deep, she toppled to a horizontal position on the surface, and began to swim. She was headed for San Francisco when Descomb's attention was called from her to a boat some fifty yards along the beach. In the boat's stern stood a tall, serious-minded Englishman. Nothing human but an Englishman could have looked so serious-minded on that scene.

And Dascomb knew he was going to die. The thing had been deadly before. But to have it witnessed by a tall, serious-minded Englishman! He realized that he could not kiss another hundred and fifty brown ladies to save his life.

The Englishman solemnly bade his oarsmen run him ashore. He came solemnly up the beach. He stared solemnly at the pale-faced American. Dascomb was unable to move. The Briton addressed him—

"I say, old chap—do you do this every afternoon?"

Dascomb was unable to speak.

"I say—don't you know, I rather fancy I shouldn't fancy keeping up the custom, you know. Sorry, too. I was rather hop-in', you know, you'd sent for me to take up my offer for the island. Bally sorry—but I fancy I'll have to withdraw it. Really, I couldn't give so much time to a thing like that. Beastly nuisance to break it up after you've started it. But—don't let me stop the ceremony. Unless you're prepared, you know, to consider fifty thousand. Eh? What?"

Dascomb felt something happen inside his brain. It was returning from a dull horror of coco-oil scented and beetle-nut flavored kisses to ordinary human considerations. That tall, serious Englishman was talking money. He was actually willing to give money for this island. He'd take the chief with it, and all his wives—and it would be his funeral whether the rest of them got properly saluted or not.

And fifty thousand—of course it was but half of Kitters's offer. But there hadn't been a hundred and fifty more wives and fiancées of Chief Huali-m'uali to be kissed when that offer was made.

"I'll take you," he cried huskily. "Only—only—just explain to the chief here that I'm too busy to go on to-day. Tell him I'll finish next week some time, or next month—"

Dascomb broke off his instructions. The Englishman was explaining to the chief. He did it with two words and a long foot.

"Get out," were the two words he used. The chief did not seem entirely satisfied with the explanation. He got the boot right where it helped most to give clearness

to the words. At a safe distance from its reach, Huali-m'uali turned about and grinned and bowed. His grin seemed suddenly quite intelligible. He had become respectful—and happy over it.

"Right-o!" exclaimed the Englishman without for an instant relaxing the blank solemnity of his face. "But, I say—wait a minute; what? Let's figure the commission before we go in. I say—what is one per cent of fifty thousand sovereigns? By Jove—I have it! It's just five hundred pounds! Eh? What? You know, I fancy that Kitters is a bit sharp."

Dascomb staggered a little, straightened his gait, pinched himself. He stared at the Englishman beside him. It was true. The fellow was talking English money. He couldn't talk any other kind. It wasn't fifty thousand dollars; it wasn't Kitters's hundred thousand dollars; it was, at present exchange, a snug fortune of over two hundred thousand.

"Oh, I say—the first girl I ever saw on Mangué a chappy might kiss with his eyes open!" the tall man was exclaiming again, his face as rigidly remote from the exclamatory as ever.

Dascomb stopped dead. He felt himself turning pale.

"Don't! Don't!" he gasped. "She's—she's taboo!"

"Rot!" snapped the Briton. "Who told you that?"

"Kitters—she has the white flowers in her wreath—" Dascomb insisted.

"Oh, I say—why, they all wear white flowers. Jolly droll beast, Kitters." The Englishman came back to serious matters; though it couldn't make his face more serious. "Just five hundred pounds. I sha'n't forget. Really, he is a bit sharp, don't you think? Eh? What?"

"I—I should say so," Dascomb agreed.

"Oh, Richard," Jessie Duncan exclaimed some six weeks later, "it's just like you. You've cut it off, just as I'd got to liking it. But you'll let it grow again. You must let it grow again. You will, won't you, dear?"

"I will *not*!" Dascomb uttered fiercely.

Jessie Duncan smiled. That was the way to manage her future husband.

The Green Stain

by

Carolyn Wells

Author of "Vicky Van," "Tracing the Shadow," etc.



Part IV

CHAPTER XIII.

WHERE IS NORTH?

PENNINGTON WISE was at his wits' end. His wits were of the finest type and had always stood him in good stead; but he had reached their limit, at least regarding this present case.

Baffling was too mild a word for it. Uncanny it was not, for there was no hint or evidence of anything supernatural in the taking off of Lawrence North. He was a big, strong personality, and he had gone out of that house by natural means, whether voluntarily or not.

That is, of course, if he *had* gone out of the house.

Wise was inclined to think he had, but Rodney Granniss still held to the possibility of some concealed room—perhaps a dungeon, where the mysterious disappearances could be effected.

Wise paid no attention to Granniss's opinions, not from any ill will toward the young man, but because he had concluded to his own satisfaction that there was really no space for a concealed room in the house.

North had come up there for the purpose of helping him look for such a matter, and North had agreed that it could not be.

Now North himself was gone, carried off, yet the mere phrase, "carried off," seemed to Wise incongruous.

Could North have been carried off without making noise enough to rouse the sleeping household? It was incredible!

Before discussing the matter with Minna, or calling the local police again, Wise went to the bedroom North had occupied and locked himself in.

"If I can't tell," he said to himself, "whether that man was kidnaped or whether he sneaked himself off—yet *why* would he do such a thing as that? My desperation over this puzzle is leading my mind astray."

Carefully, without touching a thing, Wise considered the state of the room.

The bed had been occupied, and, it was quite evident, had been hastily quitted. The coverings were tossed back over the footboard, and the pillow still bore the impress of a head.

On the dresser lay North's collar and tie, and beneath the pillow Wise discovered his watch and a handkerchief.

Clearly, the man had gone in haste.

On the small table lay some sheets of paper and a pencil. These papers were some that they had used the night before

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drawing plans and making measurements of the house.

Scanning the papers Wise was startled to see a scrawled message on the corner of a sheet. It read:

They've got me.—L. N.

It had been so hastily jotted down as to be almost illegible.

Had North managed to scribble it while his captor or captors looked another way? It was all too unbelievable!

The thought would creep in that North was implicated in the mystery himself. Yet that was quite as unbelievable as the rest of it.

Wise turned his attention to the disordered furniture.

The overturned chair was not broken, but a glass tumbler was. Evidently it had been knocked off the night stand. The rug was in wrinkles and one window curtain had been partly pulled from its rod.

The scratches on the hardwood floor were apparently made by scuffling feet, but of that Wise could not be sure.

In fine, the whole disorder of the room could have been made by struggling men, or could have been faked by any one desiring to produce that effect.

"Yet I've no reason to think North faked it," Wise told himself frankly, "except that that would be an easy way out of it for me! And that message he left looks genuine, and his watch is a valuable one. Oh, Lord, I *am* up against it!"

He went down-stairs and learned that Lawrence North's straw hat still hung on the hall rack. The man must have been forcibly carried off. He couldn't have walked out without collar, tie, or hat! Moreover, the doors were all locked.

It still was necessary to assume a secret exit from the house.

Wise inclined to the hinged door-frame, or window-frame, but his most careful search failed to reveal any such. He determined to get an expert carpenter to look over the house, feeling that his experience would be more exact than an architect's.

Crestfallen, dispirited and utterly nonplused, Wise sat down in the library to think it over.

First, the authorities must be told of North's disappearance, and all that, but those things he left to Granniss. The mystery was his province.

Acting on a sudden impulse Wise started off at once for North's home. This was a good-looking bungalow, of artistic effects and quiet unpretentious charm.

His knock brought the grumpy Joe Mills to the door.

"Whatcha want?" was his surly greeting.

"As I'm here on an important matter I'll come inside," Wise said, and entered the little living-room.

"Whatcha doin' here?" Mills continued.

"Where's Mr. North?"

"I don't know where he is. Isn't he here?"

"No, he stayed up to Headland House last night. Ain't you the detective from there?"

"Yes. And Mr. North left Headland House before breakfast this morning. Didn't he come home?"

"No, he didn't. Leastwise, I ain't seen him. An' I've got work to do. So you can leave as soon as you like."

"Look here, my man, keep a civil tongue in your head. Mr. North has disappeared—"

"Well, he's got a right to disappear if he likes, ain't he?"

"But he went off—"

"I don't care how he went off. It's nothin' to me. An' I've got my work to do. Now, you vamose."

"Not yet," said Wise coolly, and began to look about the house. "There's no use in taking that attitude, Mr. Mills. The authorities of the village and of the county will be here shortly—unless Mr. North turns up, which I don't think he will. Now, I'm going to do a little looking about on my own."

Wise set to work and went swiftly over the house, from room to room. He found nothing that gave him any clue to North's disappearance nor anything that gave him much information as to North's private life.

Even an examination of the letters and notes in the small desk showed only some bills, invitations, and circulars that meant nothing to the detective.

He noted some memoranda in Lawrence North's handwriting and saw that it corresponded with the note left for him.

Sheriff Potter came in while he was there, but the conversation between them was of little interest to either.

It was all so hopeless, it seemed to Wise, and so blankly mysterious, it seemed to Potter.

Claire Blackwood came over from her home, and Wise turned to her as to a friend.

"Do tell me something about this man, North, Mrs. Blackwood," he said. "Have you known him long?"

"Only through this summer," she replied. "He's a New Yorker, but I don't know much else about him."

"What's his business?"

"I'm not sure, but I think he's a real estate man. He's spending two months here, and he rented this bungalow furnished. You see, Mr. Wise, the people of this colony are a sort of lawless, happy-go-lucky set. I mean if we like any one we don't bother to inquire into his antecedents or social standing."

"Is North married?"

"I don't think so. At least, I've always thought him a bachelor, though nowadays you never can tell. He may have a wife for all I know."

"At any rate, Mrs. Blackwood, he has most mysteriously disappeared. And I do hope if you know anything—anything at all, about the man, you will tell me. I don't mind admitting I am greatly distressed and disturbed at this new development of the Varian case."

"You connect Mr. North's disappearance with Betty Varian's, then?"

"How can I help it? Both vanished from the same house. It proves, of course, that there is a secret exit, but it is strange that it cannot be found."

"It is disappointing, Mr. Wise, to find that such a famous detective as you cannot find a concealed entrance to a country house!"

"You are not more disappointed than I am, Mrs. Blackwood. I am chagrined, of course, but I am more frankly puzzled. The whole case is so amazing, the evidence

so scanty, clues non-existent. What can I do? I feel like saying I was called in too late—yet, I'm not sure I could have done better had I been here at first. I can't see where evidence has been destroyed or clues lost. It is all inexplicable."

"You are delightfully candid and far from bumptious." She smiled at him. "I feared you were of the know-it-all variety, and I see you aren't."

"Help me to know it all, Mrs. Blackwood," Wise urged. "I can't help feeling you know more about Lawrence North than any one else up here. If so, can't you tell me something of his life?"

"No, truly, Mr. Wise, I don't know any more than I've told you. He was up here last year—this is my first season. But I don't know of any one up here now that knows him very well. He is a quiet, reserved sort of man, and as a matter of fact, we are not a gossipy lot."

Disheartened and disappointed, Wise went back to Headland House, only to find that Dr. Varian had arrived during his absence.

The detective was glad to have him to talk to, for it promised at least a fresh viewpoint to be considered.

"I must admit, Dr. Varian," Wise said frankly as the two confabed in the Varian library, "that I have no theory that will fit this case at all. I have solved many mysteries, I have found many criminals, but never before have I struck a case so absolutely devoid of even an imaginary solution. Granting a criminal that desired to bring disaster to the Varian family, why should he want to abduct Lawrence North?"

"Perhaps North knew something incriminating about him," suggested the doctor.

"But that's purely supposition; there's no fact to prove it, or anything like it. As a start, suppose we assume a kidnaper of Betty Varian. Although, even before that, we have to assume a secret entrance into this house."

"That, I think, we must assume," said Varian.

"It seems so. If you knew how hard I've hunted for one! Well, then assume a kidnaper, who, for the sake of ransom, abducts Betty Varian—"

"And kills her father?"

"And kills her father, who interrupted the abduction."

"Good enough so far, but what about North?"

"I can't fit North in, unless he is in league with the criminal."

"That's too absurd. He and my brother weren't even acquaintances."

"Oh, I know it's absurd! But what isn't? I can't see a ray of light! And, then, there's that awful matter of the maid, Martha!"

"I think, Mr. Wise, that since you admit failure, there is nothing for it but to take Mrs. Varian away and give up the case."

"Leaving Betty to her fate?"

"We can search for the child just as well from Boston or New York as from here."

"I don't think so, doctor. Take Mrs. Varian away if you wish, and if she will go. I shall stay here and solve this mystery. Because I have failed thus far is no proof I shall continue to be unsuccessful. Mrs. Varian is a rich woman. I am not a poor man. I shall use such funds as she provides, supplementing them, if necessary, with my own, but I shall find Betty Varian if she's alive. I shall find Lawrence North if he is alive. And I shall discover the murderer or murderers of Frederick Varian and of Martha."

"You speak confidently, Mr. Wise."

"I do; because I mean to devote my whole soul to this thing. I can't fail ultimately—I *can't*!"

The man was so desperate in his determination, so sincere in his intent that Dr. Varian was impressed, and said heartily: "I believe you will. Now, here's something I've found out. I've talked with my brother's lawyer, and I find there was something in Frederick's life that he kept secret. I don't for one minute believe it was anything disgraceful or dishonorable, for I knew my brother too well for that. But it may have been some misfortune, even some youthful error. But whatever it was, it had an effect on his later years."

"And there's that strange matter of the Varian pearls. Those pearls, Mr. Wise, are historic. They have never been bequeathed

to any one save the oldest son or daughter of a Varian. Now, the fact that Betty and her father sometimes squabbled is not enough to make my brother leave them to my daughter instead of to his own. Yet I can form no theory to explain the fact that he did do so. I've tried to think he was temporarily or hypochondriacally insane, but I can't reconcile that belief with my knowledge of his physical health and well-being.

"Then I've wondered if he ever did me a wrong in the past that I never learned of, and if this was by way of reparation. But that is too unlikely. Again I've thought that there might be some error in the family records, and that I might be the elder son instead of Fred. But I checked it all up, and he was two years my senior. Yet, he told the lawyer who drew up his will that justice demanded that the pearls be left to his niece instead of to his daughter. Now what could he have meant by that?"

"I can't imagine, but I'm glad you have told me these things. For it makes me feel there must be something pretty serious back of all this. You don't think it could in any way reflect on Mrs. Varian?"

"No, I don't. I've talked it over with the lawyer and also with my wife, and we all agree that Minna Varian is a true, sincere and good woman. There is not only no blame or stigma to be attached to her in any way, but whatever was the secret of my brother's life, his wife knows nothing of it."

"Yet I can imagine no secret, no incident that would necessitate that strange bequest of the family pearls."

"Nor can I, except that he might have thought he owed me some reparation for some real or fancied wrong. It must have been to me, for he couldn't have wronged my daughter in any way. There was no question about the division of my father's fortune. We were the only children, and it was equally shared. The pearls were Frederick's, as he was the oldest child. That's all there is to the matter. Only it is strange that my brother spoke in the way he did to his lawyer. He seemed really broken up over the business, the lawyer said. And he was deeply moved when he

dictated the clause leaving the pearls to Eleanor."

"Betty is really the child of the Frederick Varians?" Wise asked.

"Oh, yes. Mrs. Varian lost her first two babies in infancy, and when the third child was expected we were all afraid it would not live. Betty was a healthy baby from the first, and I've known her all her life."

"Her father was as fond of her as her mother was?"

"Yes, and no. I can't explain it, Mr. Wise, but in my medical practise I've not infrequently found a definite antipathy between a father and a daughter. For no apparent reason, I mean. Well, that condition existed between Frederick Varian and his child. They almost never agreed in their tastes or opinions, and while they were affectionate at times there was friction at other times. Minna and Betty were always congenial, thought alike on all subjects and never had any little squabbles. I'm telling you this in hopes it will help you, though I confess I don't see how it can."

"I hope it may. At any rate, it is interesting in view of the strange occurrences up here. You've found no papers or letters bearing on this matter among Mr. Varian's effects?"

"No; except a few proofs that he was more or less blackmailed."

"And you can't learn by whom?"

"No; there were one or two veiled threats that might have meant blackmail, and yet might not. I have them safe, but I didn't bring them up here."

"It doesn't matter. Such a careful blackmailer as the one we have to deal with never would write letters that could be traced."

"And what is to be done in this North matter?"

"First of all I shall offer a large reward for any word of him. I have faith in offered rewards, if they are large enough. They often tempt accomplices to turn State's evidence. I've already ordered posters and advertisements with portraits of North. My agents will attend to this, and though it may bring no results, if it doesn't—it will be a hint in another direction."

"Meaning?"

"That Lawrence North is implicated in the crimes."

"No, I can't agree to that. Why, the man himself was carried off—"

"I know. Oh, well, Dr. Varian, first of all we must find that secret passage. There is one—we can't blink that fact. But where is it? Think of having a given problem like that and being unable to solve it! I am so amazed at my own helplessness that I am too stunned to work!"

"Go to it, man. You'll find it. Tear the house down if necessary, but get at it somehow."

"I shall; I've already sent for carpenters to demolish some parts of the house."

"I wish I could stay up here and see the work progress. You'll have to find the secret, you know. You can't help it if you tear down the whole structure."

"I don't mean to do that. I want to continue to live in the house. But some expert carpenters can dig into certain portions of it without making the rest uninhabitable, and that's what I propose doing."

"What about finger-prints? I thought you detectives set great store by those."

"Not in a case like this. Suppose we find finger-prints. They're not likely to be those of any registered criminal. And since this talk with you I shall turn my investigations in a slightly different channel, anyhow. I must look up Mr. Varian's past life—"

"Look all you wish, but I tell you now you'll find nothing indicative. Whatever secret my brother had it was not a matter of crime, or even of lighter wrong-doing. And if Frederick Varian wanted to keep the matter secret neither you nor any other detective will ever find it out!"

"That may have been true during your brother's life, doctor, but now that he can't longer protect his secret, it must come out."

"All right, Mr. Wise, I truly hope it will. For even if it reflects upon my brother's integrity it may aid in finding Betty. I don't believe that girl is dead, do you?"

"No; I don't. I believe these letters from the kidnapers are true bills. I believe they have her concealed and confined, and by Heaven, Dr. Varian, I'm going to

find her! I know that sounds like mere bluster, but I've never totally failed on a case yet. And this, the biggest one I've ever tackled, shall not be my first failure! I must succeed!"

"If I can help in any way, command me. I'm glad to see you don't think I'm criminally implicated because of the legacy of the pearls. Eleanor shall never touch them until we've positively concluded that Betty is dead. But that's a small matter. Those pearls have lain undisturbed in safe deposit many years. They may lie there many years more, but let the search go on steadily."

"You know nothing of North personally?"

"No; I never met him. Has he no relatives?"

"Haven't found any yet. But, you see, the police don't hold that it is a criminal case as yet. They say he may have walked out of his own accord."

"Half dressed, and leaving his watch behind him?"

"And that note to say what had happened! That note rings true, doctor, and either it is sincere, or North is one of the cleverest scamps I ever met up with!"

"It's conceivable that he is a scamp, but I can't see anything that points to it. Why should a perfect stranger to the Varian family cut up such a trick as to come up here and pretend to be kidnaped if he wasn't? It's too absurd."

"Everything is too absurd," said Wise bitterly.

CHAPTER XIV.

A GREEN STAIN.

"TELL me more about Betty," Zizi said, "that is, if you don't mind talking about her."

"Oh, no," Minna returned, "I love to talk about her. It's the only way I can keep my hope alive!"

Zizi was sitting with Mrs. Varian while the nurse went out for a walk. There was a mutual attraction between the two, and the sympathetic dark eyes of the girl rested on the face of the bereaved mother.

"Tell me about her when she was little. Was she born in New York?"

"No; at the time of her birth we chanced to be spending a summer up in Vermont, up in the Green Mountains. I hoped to get home before Betty arrived, but I didn't, and she was born in a tiny, little hospital way up in a Vermont village. But she was a strong, healthy baby, and has never been ill a day in her life."

"And she is so pretty and sweet. I know not only from her picture, but from everything I hear about her. I'm going to find her, Mrs. Varian!"

Zizi's strange little face glowed with determination and she smiled hopefully.

"I don't doubt your wish to do so, Zizi, dear, but I can't think you will succeed. I'm so disappointed in Mr. Wise's failure—"

"He hasn't failed!" Zizi cried, instantly eager to defend her master. "Don't say that! He is baffled; it's a most extraordinary case, but he hasn't failed, and he won't fail!"

"But he's been here a week, and what has he done so far?"

"I'll tell you what he's done, Mrs. Varian." Zizi spoke seriously. "We were talking it over this morning, and he's done this much. He's discovered, at least to his own conviction, that Betty was really kidnaped. That those letters you have received are from the abductors and that through them we must hope to trace Betty's present whereabouts. This would not be accomplished by merely following their instructions as to throwing money over the cliff. As you know, Dr. Varian advises strongly against that, and Mr. Wise does, too. But they have learned of some more letters found among your husband's papers, signed 'Step,' and we hope to prove a connection between those and the kidnapers' letters."

"What good will that do?" Minna asked, listlessly. "Oh, Zizi, you're a dear girl, but you've no idea what I'm suffering. Nights, as I lie awake in the darkness, I seem to hear my baby Betty calling to me. I seem to feel her little arms round my neck—somehow my mind goes back to her baby days, more than to her later years."

"That's natural, dear, when you're so

anxious and worried about her. But, truly, I believe we'll find her yet. Everything points to the theory that she is alive."

"Oh, theories don't help any."

"Oh, yes, they do, dear. Now, try to get up a little more hope. Take it from me, you'll see Betty again! She'll come dancing in, just as she used to do. Say, Mrs. Varian, why did she and her father squabble so?"

"I can't explain it. I've thought over it often, but it seems to me there was no reason for it. He admired Betty, he was proud of her beauty and grace and accomplishments, but there was something in the child that he didn't like. I hate to say this, but he seemed to have a natural dislike toward her that he honestly tried to overcome, but he utterly failed in the attempt."

"How very strange!"

"It surely is. I've never mentioned it to any one before, but you are so sympathetic I want to ask you what you think could have been the reason for anything like that?"

"Did Betty feel that way toward him?"

"Oh, no! I mean, not naturally so. But when he would fly at her and scold her for some little, simple thing, of course she flared up and talked back at him. It was only petty bickering, but it was so frequent."

"Wasn't Mr. Varian pleased when he learned that you expected another child?"

"Yes, he was delighted. He feared it might not live, as the others hadn't, but he was pleased beyond words at the prospect, and we both hoped for a healthy baby. He was so careful of me, so devoted and loving, and so joyful in the anticipation of the new baby."

"He was with you in Vermont?"

"Oh, yes; we had a cottage, and he stayed there while I was in the hospital during my confinement. The house was near by, and he could come to see me at any time."

"Well, I can't understand his turning against her later. Do they look alike?"

"No—that is, they have similar coloring, but no real resemblance."

"Betty doesn't look like you, either?"

"Not specially. Though I can't see resemblances as some people do. She was—"

"Is, Mrs. Varian!"

"Well, then, Betty is a dear, pretty, sweet-faced girl, healthy and happy, but not remarkable in any way."

"Did she inherit your disposition or her father's?"

"Neither particularly. But I don't think a young girl often shows definite or strong traits of character."

"Some do," Zizi said thoughtfully.

"How about talents? I want to find out, you see, more of what Betty is like."

"She has a little musical talent, a taste for drawing, and a fondness for outdoor sports, but none of these is marked. I can't describe the child otherwise than as a natural, normal, every-day girl. I adore her, of course, but I am not blind to the fact that she is not a genius in any way."

"Nor do you want her to be! As you've told me of her, she seems to me a darling, and I mean to find her for you, and for Mr. Granniss."

"Yes, Rodney loves her, and he is as desolate as I am at her loss. Oh, Zizi, have you really any hope, or are you just saying this to comfort me?"

"I really have hope, and more; I have conviction that we will yet have Betty back here. But it is not yet a certainty, and I only can offer you my own opinions. Still, dear, it's better to hope than to despair, and any day may bring us good news."

Zizi recounted this whole conversation to Pennington Wise, not so much because she deemed it important, but because he wanted every word she could get reported to him.

The man was frankly bewildered.

"It's too ridiculous," he exclaimed to Zizi, "that I, Pennington Wise, should have a great, a unique mystery, as this one is—and not be able to make one step of progress toward its solution!"

"Step," Zizi said, "makes me think of that blackmailing person, Stephen, or whatever his name is. Let's work from that end."

"I've tried and there's no place to start from. You see, the letters signed 'Step' are as untraceable as the kidnapers' letters. They're typed, not on the same machine, but on some equally obscure and unavail-

able one. It's impossible to hunt a type-writer with no suspect and no notion of where to look!"

"It would be for an ordinary detective, Penny, but for you—"

"That's just it, Ziz. An ordinary detective would say, 'Pooh, of course we can trace that!' But I'm not an ordinary detective, and my very knowledge and experience prove to me how baffling, how hopeless, this search is. Sometimes I think Frederick Varian did away with Betty."

"That's rubbish!" Zizi said calmly. "But I do think there was some definite reason for Mr. Varian's attitude toward his daughter."

"No question of her paternity?"

"Good Lord, no! Minna Varian is the best and sweetest woman in the world! But I've a glimmer of a notion that I can't work out yet—"

"Tell me."

"It's too vague to put into words." Zizi knit her heavy eyebrows and screwed up her red lips.

And then the carpenters came, and the demolition of Headland House began. It was carefully managed; no rooms that the family used were put in disorder, but the kitchen quarters and the cellar were desperately dug into.

"The kitchen is indicated," Wise said to Dr. Varian. "For it is clear to my mind that Betty was carried out through it."

"Through the kitchen?"

"Yes; you see, doctor, we must reconstruct the matter like this. Betty came back to the house alone. She came in the front door with her father's key. Now, she must have been attacked or kidnaped then and there. I mean whoever did it—and we have to assume somebody did do it—was in the house waiting. Well, say he was, for the moment. Then, say Betty put up a fight, which of course she would, then she was carried off through the kitchen by means of the secret passage, which we have got to find! She had the yellow pillow in her hands for some reason—can't say what—and she dropped it on the kitchen floor, or maybe the villain used the pillow to stifle the girl's screams."

"Go on," said Dr. Varian.

"Then owing to the girl's struggles the string of beads round her neck broke and scattered over the floor."

"Only part of them."

"Yes; the others stayed with her, or were picked up by the kidnapers."

"More than one?"

"I think two. For when Mr. Varian arrived upon the scene one of them turned on him and killed him, while there must have been another to hold Betty. It is possible there was only one, but I doubt it."

"And you think the concealed entrance is through the kitchen?"

"That, or the cellar. Anyway, there is one, and it must be found! It was used the night Martha was killed, it was used the night North disappeared. Why, man, it *must* be there, and I must find it!"

"True enough, and I hope you will."

"Here's something, Penny," Zizi said, appearing suddenly at his elbow. "I've found a stain on my frock that's exactly like the one we noticed on Martha's hand."

"What?"

"Yes, a green stain. A long swish, as of green paint—but it isn't paint."

Zizi held up a little linen frock that she sometimes wore mornings. On the side, down near the hem, was a green smear, and it was similar in appearance to the strange mark on the hand of the dead girl.

"Where'd it come from?" asked Wise.

"I don't know, but it's the dress I wore when I was exploring the cellar, and it got pretty dirty."

"Been washed?"

"No, I shook off and brushed off most of the dirt, but this stain stuck, and wouldn't brush off. That's how I noticed it."

"Coincidence, I'm afraid. Or maybe Martha went down-cellar that night for something."

"But what in the cellar would make a mark like that?"

"Dunno, Ziz. There's no green paint down there."

"It isn't paint, Penny," Zizi persisted. "It doesn't smell like paint."

"What does it smell like?"

"There's no odor to it that I can notice. But it's a clue."

"So's the yellow pillow, so are the scattered beads, so was the footprint of cellar dust on the library floor, but they're all blind clues. They lead nowhere."

"Penny Wise! What ails you? I never knew you so ready to lie down on a job!"

"No, Zizi, not that. It's only that I can see how futile and useless all these clues are. We've got to get some bigger evidence. In fact, we can do nothing till we find the way the criminal got in and out of this house. Don't tease me, Zizi; I never was so put about!"

"You must be, when you revert to your old-fashioned phrases!" The girl laughed at him, but there was deepest sympathy in her dark eyes, and an affectionate, brooding glance told of her anxiety for him.

The carpenters found nothing. They proved beyond all possible doubt that there was no secret passage between the interior of Headland House and the outer world, that there could be none, for every inch of space was investigated and accounted for.

"There's no way to get into that house except through its two doors or its windows," the master carpenter declared, and the men who were watching knew he spoke the truth.

"It proves," Granniss said, looking up from the plans to the actual walls, "it's all just as this drawing shows it."

"It certainly is," agreed Dr. Varian. "There's no missing bit."

"No," said Wise, thoughtfully, "there isn't. And, at least, the carpenters have proved that there is no secret passage built into this house. Yet there is one. I will find it."

For the first time his words seemed to be spoken with his own conviction of their truth. His voice had a new ring, his eyes a new brightness, and he seemed suddenly alert and powerful mentally, where before his hearers had thought him lacking in energy.

"You've thought of a new way to go about it?" asked Granniss.

"I have! It may not work, but I've a new idea, at least. Zizi, let me see that stained dress of yours again."

Obediently Zizi brought her frock with the stain still on its hem. Wise looked

at it closely, sniffed it carefully, and gave it back, saying:

"If you want to remove that stain, dear, just wash it with soap and water. It'll come off then. Now, I'm going down to the village and I may not be back for luncheon. Don't wait for me."

"Do you think he really has a new theory, or is he just stalling for time?" Dr. Varian asked when Wise had left.

"Oh, he's off on a new tack," she said, and her eyes shone. "I know him so well, you see, I'm sure he has a new idea and a good one. I've never seen him so cast down and so baffled as he has been over this case, but now that his whole demeanor is changed he has a fresh start, I know, and he'll win out yet! I never doubted his success from the beginning, but the last two days he has been at low ebb."

"I have to go back to Boston this afternoon," Dr. Varian went on, "but I'll be up again in a few days. Meantime, keep me informed, Rodney, of anything new that transpires."

Down in the little village of Headland Harbor, Pennington Wise went first to see Claire Blackwood.

She seemed to know more about Lawrence North than any one else did, yet even she knew next to nothing.

"No," she told the detective, "the police haven't found out anything definite about him yet. Why don't you take up the search for him, Mr. Wise?"

"I've all I can do searching for Betty Varian," he returned with a smile. "I'm not employed to hunt up North, and I am to find Miss Varian. But surely the police can get on the track of him. A man like that can't drop out of existence."

"That's just what he's done, though," said Claire. "Do you know, Mr. Wise, I believe Lawrence North is a bigger man than we supposed. I mean a more important one than he himself admitted. I think he was up here incognito."

"You mean that North is not his real name?"

"I don't know about that, but I mean that he wanted a rest or wanted to get away from everybody who knew him—and so he came up here to be by himself. How else

explain the fact that they can't find out anything about him?"

"Don't they know his city address?"

"Yes, but only an office, which is closed up for the summer."

"Ridiculous! They ought to find him all the more easily if he is a man of importance."

"I don't mean of public importance, but I think—oh, I don't know what! But I'm sure there's something mysterious about him."

"I'm sure of that, too! And you know nothing of his private life, Mrs. Blackwood?"

"No; I've heard that he is a widower, but nobody seems quite certain. As I told you up here, nobody questions one's neighbors."

"Isn't it necessary before members are taken into the club?"

"Oh, yes; but Mr. North wasn't a member of the club. Lots of the summer people aren't members, but they use the clubhouse, and nobody makes much difference between members and non-members. It isn't like the more fashionable beaches or resorts. We're a bit primitive up here."

"Well, tell me of North's financial standing. He's a rich man?"

"Not that I know of. But he always has enough to do what he likes. Nobody is very rich up here, yet nobody is really poor. We're a medium-sized lot in every way."

"Yet North owns a fine motor-boat."

"One of the best and fastest. But he doesn't own it; he rents it by the season. Most people do that."

"I see. And that not very pleasant factotum of his, Joe Mills? Is he a native product?"

"No, he came up with Mr. North. He's grumpy, I admit, but he's a good sort after all. And devoted to his master."

"Ah, then he must be inconsolable at North's disappearance."

"No; on the contrary he takes it calmly enough. He says North knows his own business, and will come back when he gets ready."

"Then he knows where North is—"

"He pretends he does," corrected Claire.

"I'm not sure that he is as easy about the matter as he pretends. I saw him this morning and I think he is pretty well disturbed about it all."

"Guess I'll go to see him. Thank you, Mrs. Blackwood, for your patience and courtesy in answering my questions."

"Then, Mr. Wise, if you're really grateful, do tell me what you think about the Varian affair. That's much more mysterious and much more important than the matter of Lawrence North's disappearance. Are they connected?"

"It looks so, doesn't it?"

"Yes, but that's no answer. Do you think they are?"

"I do, Mrs. Blackwood, I surely do."

And Pennington Wise walked briskly over to the bungalow of Lawrence North.

He found Mills in no kindly mood.

"Whatcha want now?" was his greeting, and his scowl pointed his words.

"I want you to take me out for a sail in Mr. North's motor-boat."

"Well, you gotcha nerve with you! What makes you think I'll do that?"

"Because it's for your own best interests to do so."

Wise looked the man straight in the eye, and had the satisfaction of seeing Mills's own gaze waver.

"Whatcha mean by that?" he growled truculently.

"That if you don't take me I'll think you have some reason for refusing."

"I gotta work."

"Your work will keep. We'll be gone only a few hours at most. How is the tide now?"

"Plumb low."

"Come on, then. We start at once."

Whether Mills decided it was best for him to consent to the trip or whether he was cowed by the detective's stern manner, Wise didn't know and didn't care, but the trip was made.

Wise directed the course, and Mills obeyed. Few words were spoken save those necessary for information.

Their course lay out around the headland, and into the small bay on the other side of it.

As they rounded the cliff Wise directed

the other to keep as close to the shore as possible.

"Dangerous rocks," Mills said briefly.

"Steer clear of them," admonished Wise.

After passing round the headland on all its exposed sides Wise declared himself ready to return.

In silence Mills turned his craft about, and again Wise told him to make the trip as close to the rocky cliff as he could manage.

"You want to get us into trouble?" asked Mills as he made a quick turn between two treacherous-looking points of rock. "I nearly struck then!"

"Well, you didn't," said Wise cheerfully. "You're a clever sailor Mills. Get along back home now."

CHAPTER XV.

CRIMINAL OR VICTIM?

PENNINGTON WISE came to the conclusion that he had now on hand the hardest job of his life. This knowledge did not discourage him. On the contrary it spurred him to continuous and desperate effort.

Yet, as he told Zizi, his efforts consisted mostly in making inquiries here and there in a hope that he might learn something indicative.

"It isn't a case for clues, evidence, or deduction," he told her. "It's—I hate the word—but it's psychological."

"If you can't be logical be psychological," said Zizi flippantly. "Now, you know, Penny, you're going to win out—"

"If I do, it'll be solely and merely because of your faith in me," he said, his face beginning to show the look of discouragement that she had learned to dread.

"That's all right," she responded, "but this old faith of mine, while it will never wear out, its effect on you will. Don't depend on it too long. Now let's count up what we've really got toward a solution."

"We've got a lot," began Wise hopefully. "We know enough to assume that Betty Varian was kidnaped and her father shot by the same hand. Or rather by orders

of the same master brain. I don't say the criminal himself committed these crimes. Then we know that our master villain got in and out of this house, or his subordinates did, by a means which he haven't yet discovered, but which I am on the trail of."

"Oh, Penny, are you? Tell me where you think it is? Is it through the kitchen?"

"Wait a couple of days, Ziz. I'll tell you as soon as I'm certain. In fact, I may have to wait a week to find out about it."

"Getting an expert on it?"

"Nope. Working it out myself, but it all depends on the moon."

"Oh, Penny, I've long suspected you of being lunny, but I didn't think you'd admit it yourself! Howsoever, as long as you're jocular, I'm not discouraged. It's when you pull a long face and heave great, deep sighs that my confidence begins to wobble."

"Don't wobble yet, then, my dear, for when the moon gets around to the right quarter I'll show you the secret way in and out of this house."

"It's too bad of you, Penny, to spring those cryptic remarks on me! Save 'em for people you want to impress with your cleverness. But all right, wait till the moon gets in apogee or perigee or wherever you want her."

"I shall. And mean time, I'm going to track down friend North. He is a factor in the case, whether sinned against or sinning. That upset room was never upset in a real scuffle."

"It wasn't!"

"No, ma'am, it wasn't. I've been over it again, and unless I'm making the mistake of my life, that upset chair was carefully and silently overturned by a cautious hand."

"Meaning North's?"

"Meaning North's. Of course, Ziz, I may be mistaken, so I'm not advertising this yet, but I can't see a real scuffle in that room. To begin with, if a man—or two men—or three men, tried to kidnap Lawrence North and carry him off against his will don't you suppose there would be enough noise made to wake some of us?"

"Maybe they chloroformed him."

"Maybe they did. But I'm working on

a different maybe. Say that man wanted to disappear and make it look like an abduction. Wouldn't he have done just what he did do? Leave the room looking as if he had gone off unwillingly or unconsciously? Leaving his watch behind was a clever touch—"

"Oh, come now, Penny, I believe you *are* lunny! Do you suspect Lawrence North of all the crimes? Did he abduct Betty, shoot her father, kill Martha? And then finally abduct himself? And, if so, why?"

"Zizi, you're a bright little girl, but you don't know everything. Now you stay here and hold the fort while I go off for a few days and stalk North. I don't say he did commit all that catalogue of crimes you string off so glibly, but I do say that he has to be accounted for, and I must know whether he is a criminal or a victim."

Wise went away and the little family at Headland House tried to possess their souls in patience against his return.

Zizi devoted herself to the cheer and entertainment of Minna Varian, while Rodney Granniss found enough to do in looking after the accounts and financial matters of the estate.

Dr. Varian came up again, and was both surprised and pleased to find his brother's wife in such a calm, rational state of mind.

"Yet it is not a unique case," he said. "I've known other instances of hysterical and even unbalanced minds becoming rational and practical after a great shock or sorrow."

And the fearful blows Minna Varian had received from the hand of Fate did indeed seem to change her whole nature, and instead of a pettish, spoiled woman, she was now quiet, serious, and mentally capable.

She kept herself buoyed up with a hope of Betty's return. This hope Zizi fostered, and as the days went by it came to be a settled belief in Minna's mind that sooner or later her child would be restored to her.

Nurse Fletcher did not approve of this state of things at all.

"You know that girl will never be found!" she would say to Zizi. "You only pretend that you think she will, and it isn't right to fill Mrs. Varian's mind with fairy tales as you do!"

"Now, nurse," Zizi would wheedle her, "you let me alone. I'm sure Mrs. Varian would collapse utterly if the hope of Betty's return were taken away from her. You know she would! So don't you dare say a word that will disturb her confidence!"

Dr. Varian agreed with Zizi's ideas regarding Minna, though he said frankly that he had grave doubts of ever seeing Betty again.

"To my mind," he said as he and Zizi had a little confidential chat, "nothing has been accomplished. Nearly a month has passed since Betty disappeared. There is no theory compatible with a hope that she has been kept safely and comfortably all that time. The kidnapers, if there are any—"

"Why doubt their existence?"

"Because I'm not at all sure that those ransom letters are genuine. Anybody could demand ransom."

"You're not at all sure of anything, Dr. Varian," Zizi said, "and strictly speaking, Mr. Wise isn't either. But he is sure enough to go away and stay all this time. He's been gone ten days now, and I know unless he was on a promising trail he would have abandoned it before this."

And Pennington Wise was on a promising trail.

It was proving a long, slow business, but he was making progress.

His first start had been from Lawrence North's New York office. This he found closed and locked, and no one in attendance.

Instead of being disturbed by this he regarded it as a step forward.

The owner of the building in which North had his office told the detective that Mr. North had gone away for the summer, that he had said his office would be closed until September, at least, and that there was nothing doing.

Wise persuaded him that there was a great deal doing, and in the name of justice and a few other important institutions he must hand over a key of that office.

At last this was done, and Wise went eagerly about the examination of Lawrence North's books and papers.

The fact that he found nothing of im-

portance was to him important. North's business evidently was of a vague and sketchy character. He seemed to have an agency for two or three inconspicuous real estate firms, and he appeared to have put over a few unimportant deals.

What was important, however, was a small advertisement cut from a newspaper and almost overlooked by the detective.

This was a few lines expressing somebody's desire to rent a summer home on the seashore, preferably the Maine coast.

It was signed "F. V.," and Wise thought that it might have been inserted by Frederick Varian. He hadn't heard that the Varians took Headland House through the agency of, or at the suggestion, of North, yet it might be so.

At any rate, there was nothing else of interest to Wise in North's whole office, and he left no paper unread or book unopened.

It took a long time, but when it was accomplished the detective set out on a definite and determined search for North.

The man proved most elusive. No one seemed to know anything about him. If ever a negligible citizen lived in these United States it was, the detective concluded, Lawrence North.

He hunted directories and telephone books. He visited mercantile agencies and information bureaus. He had circulars already out with a reward offered for the missing man, but none of his efforts gave the slightest success.

Had he been able to think of North as dead he could have borne defeat better, but he envisaged that nonchalant face as laughing at his futile search!

There was, of course, the possibility that North was an assumed name, and that the true name of the man might bring about a speedy end to his quest. But this was mere surmise, and he had no way of verifying it.

By hunting down various Norths here and there he one day came upon a woman who said:

"Why, I once knew a woman named Mrs. Lawrence North. She lived in the same apartment-house I did, and I remember her because she had the same name.

No, her husband was no relation of my husband. My husband has been dead for years."

"Was her husband dead?" Wise inquired.

"No; but he better 'a' been! He only came to see her once in a coon's age. He kept her rent paid, but he hardly gave her enough money to live on! He was one of these highfalutin artistic temperament men, and he just neglected that poor thing something fierce!"

"What became of her?"

"Dunno. Maybe she's livin' there yet."

To the address given Wise went, scarcely daring to hope he was on the right track at last.

At the apartment-house he was informed that Mrs. Lawrence North had lived there, but that she had also died there, about three months previous.

The superintendent willingly gave him all the details he asked, and Pennington Wise concluded that the woman who had died there was without doubt the wife of the Lawrence North he was hunting for.

But further information of North's later history he could not gain. After the death of his wife he had given up the apartment, which was a furnished one, and had never been there since.

Wise cogitated deeply over these revelations. So far, he had learned nothing greatly to North's discredit, save that he had not treated his wife very well, and that he had, directly after her death, gone to a summer resort and mingled with society there.

Yet this latter fact was not damaging. To his knowledge North had not acted, up at Headland Harbor, in any way unbecoming a widower. He had not been called upon to relate his private or personal history, and if he had sought diversion among the summer colony of artists and dilettantes, he had, of course, a right to do so.

Yet, the whole effect of the man was suspicious to Wise.

He told himself it was prejudice, that there was no real evidence against him. But, he then thought, if North was a blameless, undistinguished private citizen, why,

in heaven's name, would anybody want to kidnap him?

To himself he answered this by saying North might have learned some secret of the kidnapers or of the secret entrance that made it imperative for the criminals to do away with him. This might also explain the death of the maid, Martha.

But through it all Wise believed that North was in wrong. How or to what extent he didn't know, but North must be found.

So to the various undertakers' establishments he went until at last he found the one which had had charge of the obsequies of Mrs. Lawrence North.

That was a red-letter day in the life of Pennington Wise. For, though he gained no knowledge there of his elusive quarry, he did learn the name and former dwelling place of the woman North married.

She had been, he discovered, a widow, and had been born in Vermont. Her name when she married North was Mrs. Curtis, and they had been married about ten years ago.

While not an astounding revelation, this was of interest and at least promised further information about North's matrimonial affairs.

The town in Vermont was Greenvale, a small village, Wise discovered, in the northern part of the State.

It was a long trip, but the detective concluded that this case on which he was engaged was a case of magnificent distance, and he at once made his railroad reservations and bought his tickets.

Meantime the household at Headland House had been thrown into a new spasm of excitement by the receipt of a letter from a stranger.

It was addressed to Mrs. Varian, and was of a totally different character from the frequent missives she received telling of girls who looked like the pictures of the advertised lost one.

This was a well-written, straightforward message that carried conviction by its very curtness. It ran as follows:

MRS. VARIAN:

Dear Madam—I address you regarding a peculiar experience I have just had. I am

deaf, and therefore I never go to the theater, as I can't hear the lines. But I go often to the moving pictures. Of late I have been taking lessons in lip-reading, and though I have not yet progressed very far in it, I can read lips sometimes, especially if the speaker makes an effort to form words distinctly. Now last night I went to the movies and in a picture there was a girl, who seemed to be speaking, yet there was no occasion in the story for her to do so. She was merely one of a crowd standing in a meadow or field. But as practise in my lip-reading I watched her, and I am sure she said, "I am Betty Varian, I am Betty Varian." This seemed so strange that I went again this afternoon, and saw the picture again, and I am sure that was what she said, over and over. I don't know that this will interest you, but I feel I ought to tell you.

Very truly yours,

ELLA SHERIDAN.

"It can't mean anything," Minna said. "Wherever Betty is, she isn't in a moving-picture company!"

"But wait a minute," cried Granniss. "When they take pictures of crowds, you know, in a field or meadow, they pick up any passer-by or any one they can get to fill in."

"Even so," Zizi said, "I can't see it. I think somebody was talking about Betty and the girl read the lips wrong. She's only a beginner, she says. I've heard it's a most difficult thing to learn."

"I don't care," Granniss said, "it's got to be looked into. I'm going to answer this letter. No, I'm going straight down there. It's from Portland, and I'm going to see that picture myself."

"Make sure it's still being shown," said the practical Zizi.

"I'll telegraph and ask her," cried Rodney, his eager face alight at the thought of doing some real work himself.

"Oh, don't go, Rod," Minna said. "I can't get along without you. And what good will it do? You know a picture isn't the real people, and—oh, it's all too vague and hazy—"

"No, it isn't," Granniss insisted. "It's the first real clue. Why didn't that girl notice what the girl in the picture looked like? Oh, of course I must go! I can get to Portland and back in three days, and—why, I've got to go!"

And go he did.

The picture was still on at the theater, and with a beating heart Rodney took his seat to watch it.

He could scarcely wait for the preliminary scenes. He knew no bit of the plot or what happened to the characters. He sat tense and watchful for the appearance of the crowd in the meadow.

At last it came—and he nearly sprang from his seat. It *was* Betty! Betty Varian herself—he could not be mistaken! She wore a simple gingham frock, a plain straw hat, and had no sign of the smartness that always characterized Betty's clothes, but he could not be deceived in that face, that dear, lovely face of Betty herself!

And he saw her lips were moving. He could not read them, as the girl who told of it had done, but he imagined she said, "I am Betty Varian. I am Betty Varian."

Yet her face was expressionless. She had no eager air of imparting information, no apparent interest on the scene about her. The face in the screen seemed like that of an automaton saying the words as if from a lesson.

Rod couldn't understand it. He feared that it was merely a chance likeness, he had heard of exact doubles, and as the scene passed, and the crowd on the meadow returned no more to the story, he left his seat and went in search of the owner of the theater.

But all his questioning failed to elicit any information as to the scene or where it was taken. The theatrical manager arranged for his pictures through an agent and knew nothing of the company that took it or the author of the play.

The next morning Rodney tried again to locate the producer; but, failing, decided to return home and put the matter in the hands of Pennington Wise.

He was sure the girl on the screen was Betty, yet had he been told authoritatively that it was not he could believe himself the victim of a case of mistaken identity.

He related his experience to Minna and Zizi, and they both felt there was little to hope for a result.

"You see," Zizi explained it, "when those crowds are picked up at random that

way they are always chatting about their own affairs. Now, it may well be this girl had been reading the circulars about Betty, also she may have been told how much she looked like her, and that would explain her speaking the name. And except for the actual name, I don't believe that Ella Sheridan person read it right."

"I don't either," Minna agreed. "I wish I could see something in it, Rod, but it's too absurd to think of Betty in the moving pictures, even by chance, as you say. And, too, where could she be that she would saunter out and join in a public picture like that?"

"I know it seems utterly absurd, but it was Betty. It was, it *was*! When will Mr. Wise be back, Zizi?"

"I had a letter this morning, and he says not to expect him before the end of the week, at least. He is on an important trail and has to go to a distant town. Then he will come back here."

"Oh, I want to consult him about this thing." Rodney looked disconsolate.

"Work at it yourself, Rod," Zizi advised him. "Get lists of the picture-making companies, write to them all, and track down that film. Go to it!"

"I will," Rodney declared and forthwith set about it.

"Now I want to go off on a little trip," Zizi said to Minna. "And I don't want to say where I'm going, for it may turn out a wild-geese chase. The idea is not a very big one—yet it might be the means of finding out a lot of the mystery. Anyway, I want to go and I'll be back in three days, or four at most."

"I hate to have you leave me, Zizi," Minna answered, "but if it means a chance, take it. Get back as soon as you can. I've grown to depend on you for all my help and cheer."

So Zizi packed her bag and departed.

With her she took a letter that she had abstracted from a drawer of Minna Varian's writing-desk, a letter postmarked Green-vale, Vermont, written at the time of Betty's birth.

She had taken it without leave, indeed without the owner's knowledge, but she felt the end justified the means.

"If indeed the end amounts to anything," Zizi thought, a little ruefully.

Once started on her journey, it seemed like a wilder goose chase than it had at first appeared.

The route, a little, ill-appointed New England railroad, took her inland into the State of Maine, and then westward, until she was in the green hills and valleys of Vermont.

It was when the conductor sung out "Greenvale" that Zizi, her journey ended, alighted from the train.

She found a rickety old conveyance known as a buckboard, and asked the indifferent driver thereof if she might be conveyed to any inn or hostelry that Greenvale might boast.

Still taciturn, the lanky youth that held the horse told her to "get in." Zizi got in, and was transported to a small inn that was not half so bad as she had feared.

She paid her charioteer, and as he set her

bag down for her on the porch, she went into the first room, which seemed to be the office.

"Can I have a room for a day or two?" she asked.

"Sure," said the affable clerk, looking at her with undisguised admiration.

Zizi smiled at him, quite completing his subjugation, for she wished to be friendly in order to get all the help she could on her mission.

"Greenvale is a lovely place. How large is it?" she asked.

"Most three thousand," said the clerk proudly. "Gained a lot of late."

"Do you have many visitors in the summer?"

"Lots; and we've got a noted one here right now."

"Who?"

"Nobody less than—why, here he comes now." Zizi looked toward the door. Just entering she saw—Pennington Wise!

(To be concluded NEXT WEEK.)

For Maggie's Sake

by
Gailard Backman



IN spite of her name, Maggie Bills was not altogether hard to look at. No one knew very much about her, except that the little mountain village of Pine had pulled itself out of bed late one Sunday morning in July to find itself in possession of a rather cityfied young lady. Since that first Sunday morning that same young lady

had been persistently fixing herself as an integral part of the village life. Just how she managed to conceal all matters relating to her origin, past history, and future intentions from the artful inquisitiveness of the village gossips was rather disconcerting to their sense of curiosity, to say the least.

At first they had conjectured all manner of hypotheses. Her rather stylish clothes and friendliness with the men folks aroused some rather uncomplimentary suspicions on the part of some of the women. But when, after a few weeks, Maggie had donned a more subdued attire and gone to work in the Bellevue Trading Company's store, the ladies became a little ashamed of their untimely judgment and welcomed her into Pine society.

From that time on Maggie became an accepted part of their social life, enriching it with her own charms and her unusual propensity for contriving new schemes of pleasure with which to relieve the monotony of their dull routine life. Then she had slipped off for a summer to attend school, and in the winter was elected to the better-paying and more dignified position of school mistress to the rising generation.

So it happened that, in spite of her steady non-committal attitude in regard to herself, the village folk became finally satisfied of her worth and character. The women would have sworn by her, and every man in Pine and the country round about would have fought to his last tooth and toenail in defense of her good name.

It only remains to be added that the majority of unclaimed and otherwise eligible gentlemen of the neighborhood at times actually entertained some rather high aspirations for her future. The chief among these was young William Howle, son of a country doctor who lived in Pine and practised all the way from the Toll Gate to Atlanta. William was better and more familiarly known as Bill.

Then there blew into town, from the direction of Featherville, a bull-necked fellow by the name of Chauncey Wilkes. He was a pugnacious, loud-mouthed individual, with a caliban mug that was decorated by a scar on one side reaching from the roots of his hair to the tip of his chin. Pine fell in love with him at first sight in the same sense that a bull-terrier loves a cat.

"I'm from Atlanta," said Wilkes on the occasion of his arrival. "Been working in the mines. Headin' for the railroad and a winter of leisure, unless I meets up with a bit of excitement before I gets there. Who

dumped this burg off here?" he queried, turning to young Howle. "He must 'a' been in a hurry. What do you mildewed galoots do for amusement in this God-forsaken pinch of snuff—sit around all day waitin' fer the stage to pull in, and then spend the rest of the time sittin' in the post-office listenin' to Uncle Ezra read the newspaper?"

"That would be a danged sight more entertaining than listening to your line of bull," shot Howle, pulling himself up sideways to the counter.

"Am I listenin' to a gentleman or an impertinent country kid?" asked Wilkes, with an "I beg your pardon" air, wheeling around to the perpetrator of the unkind remark.

"Oh, hell!" spit Howle disgustedly, and walked out, leaving the stranger to entertain more interested listeners.

"These young snouts can't resist airing themselves before cultured and informed gentlemen," remarked the newcomer, and then proceeded to emit several volumes of information about himself, with which engagement he had no trouble occupying the time until Dilworth ushered him out and closed up the store for the night—about two hours earlier than usual.

The next day Chauncey Wilkes scared up some moonshine whisky and cultivated an irreproachably effective state of intoxication. About three days later, having survived this deluge of bad liquor, Chauncey pulled himself out of bed, tidied up his rather unwieldy person, and went out on the hotel veranda to refresh his memory concerning the shape and architecture of the village.

Nearly an hour passed before a living soul showed up. Then Chauncey saw a girl coming down the road about a half-mile away. He turned his chair around, filled his pipe, and settled down to the leisurely occupation of watching this evidence that the place he was in was inhabited.

The girl came on down the road, swinging her hat, gazing off in first one direction and then another, stooping at the roadside to pick a flower; and finally she started to whistle a tune—a strangely familiar tune,

which floated to Chauncey's ears, thrusting into his consciousness a host of thoughts and memories.

At last the girl was in front of the veranda. Chauncey started from his seat, pulled his pipe out of his mouth, and gaped stupidly until she had vanished in the store across the street. Then he replaced the pipe between his teeth, sank back in his chair, and to all outward appearances dismissed the matter from his mind.

In a small mountain village like Pine few things pass unnoticed and unpublished. But any place, whether in Pine or in Chicago, there are often long parts of a story which, if told, would only add to the length thereof, and being left out do not materially detract either from the detail or the interest of the subject. Suffice it then to say that Pine found itself in possession of another permanent citizen in the person of Chauncey Wilkes.

Aside from his first splurge of information delivered upon the day of his arrival, Chauncey failed to relieve himself of any further discourse concerning either his past achievements or his future purposes and ambitions. And as for what had been said—it wasn't true, so it didn't matter.

Though he did make himself disagreeable at times by belaboring the town folk for their poor judgment as demonstrated by their living in Pine, and made himself particularly obnoxious to Bill Howle, whom he nicknamed "Scream," on the whole he became more or less acceptable and was even liked by some. After a couple more moonshine sprees he settled down to a fairly irreproachable existence.

About the most unforgivable thing he did was to strike up a friendship with Maggie Bills. It was nearly a month after he had seen her from the hotel veranda before he availed himself of an opportunity to cultivate a more intimate acquaintance. Maggie having brought the folks together for a basket social, Chauncey spent a month's wages outbidding young Howle for a chance at Maggie's eatables.

He and Maggie ate lunch together, and from that date forth were seen in each other's company all too frequently to satisfy the refined and delicate tastes of Pine's

discriminating population, not to mention Bill Howle himself.

Being a lover of amusement, and somewhat of a schemer, Chauncey vied with the village schoolmistress in devising ways and means of excitement to keep the local citizenship in one continuous whirl of social pleasure. As a matter of fact, Chauncey was less of a fool and more of a gentleman than first appearances warranted. And after extending an acquaintance over a prolonged period of association his bull neck and ugly scar lost their sinister aspect. He had had a high-school education and a year of college, and when he chose could converse with a less illiterate tongue than he was ordinarily in the habit of doing.

Maggie seemed to find him quite enjoyable company; but Maggie never allowed anybody to approach very near her individual liberties, speaking from a matrimonial standpoint, and from all outward appearances Chauncey was no exception to this rule.

The inhabitants began to lose their fears and settled down to the less disconcerting routine of existing without the enjoyment of scandal or weddings. That is, all but Bill Howle, who proceeded to thrust his attentions upon Maggie with more regularity and a sincerity that made her sit up and take notice.

Now, Bill was a fine young fellow, and Maggie felt under no particular obligations to disengage herself from the pleasure and wholesomeness of his company.

II.

CHAUNCEY took the forester's examination, and landed a job as ranger at Pine. For more than a year he divided his time between riding range, providing amusement for his neighbors at Pine, and cultivating Maggie's friendship. One day as he was coming in from a prolonged trip on the range, riding along the river's edge, who should he spy standing on a rock in the middle of the stream but young Howle, attempting to entice some trout to notice his pretty spinner?

"Hello." Chauncey reined up and slipped over sideways in his saddle.

Howle looked up.

"Howdy," he grunted.

"Glad to see me, ain't ya?"

"Oh, you're nothing new. Couldn't expect me to act like a circus had come to town, could ye?"

"Hardly. By the way, Bill, I've been wanting a chance to talk to you alone for a coon's age. This looks like a good chance."

Chauncey slid off his horse and went over to the edge of the stream.

"Well, shoot," said Bill.

"My vocal apparatus wasn't made to carry on ordinary conversation across the Columbia Ocean. Stick that pole in the mud and come over and be sociable."

"It's you wants to talk. Come over here."

Whereupon Chauncey splashed off in the water and waded over to the rock where Bill was standing. Bill sat down, and Chauncey sat down beside him.

"Bill," commenced Chauncey, "you and I haven't been very intimate the last decade or so, have we?"

"Not that you could notice."

"Kinda my fault, ain't it?"

Bill looked at him out of the corner of his eye. "Can't say that you have been overly attentive to cultivating my friendship."

"Haven't wanted it particularly."

"Ditto," returned Bill.

"But that ain't neither here nor there," pursued Chauncey. "We've got one or two things in common I want to talk about now. For instance—Maggie."

"Leave her out of it," suggested Bill.

"Nope." That's what I waded through all these mountain dewdrops for—to talk to you about Maggie. You want her pretty bad, don't ye, Bill?"

"That's none of your affair."

"I'm danged if it ain't, seein' as how I want her pretty much myself. Well, what I was going to say about Maggie"—Chauncey suddenly dropped his careless brogue and assumed a more cultivated choice of words—"is this. Maggie's a pretty fine girl for either of us to look forward to, especially myself. I think she kind of likes you, Bill. You're a cleaner liver than I've

been, but it's never too late to start in on the narrow way, and I've about made up my mind to start. I'm goin' away for a couple of months, Bill, and while I'm gone I want you to do me a favor. Will ya?"

"Depends." Bill reached down and put his finger in the water.

"Of course. Well, it won't be hard. I want you to do your darnedest to settle things between you and Maggie. She won't even know but what I've pulled out for good, so you ought to make pretty good headway."

Chauncey slipped off the rock and started to plow through the water to his saddle-horse. When he reached the bank he turned around.

"You see, Scream, if I get Maggie, I want her to be satisfied. Don't want her feeling like she didn't have a chance to do better. But don't jump in the river, Bill, if she turns you down," he continued, crawling on his horse, "because I don't think you've got a ghost of a chance."

Two days later, accompanied by a trunk and a suit-case, Chauncey boarded the stage for Mountain Home, and thence to parts unknown. To the townspeople he had simply said he was pulling out. Bill couldn't quite figure him. But he was pretty much certain that the "dirty hound" wasn't so innocent as he pretended to be.

He felt deeply concerned for Maggie, lest Chauncey had devised some devilish trick to lure her away from the protecting enthrallments of Pine into his own clutches—clutches was the word that suited Bill. All the more reason, then, why Bill lost no time in carrying out Mr. Wilkes's proposition.

On a Sunday afternoon Bill drove over to Mrs. Vlatchly's, where Maggie stayed.

"Maggie, let's go for a drive," he suggested after they had talked a while and Mrs. Vlatchly had fed them some fruit and burnt-sugar cake and a glass of milk.

"Oh, let's walk."

"Suits me just as well."

They sauntered out the gate and up the road, chatting merrily of diverse topics. After rounding a turn in the road they climbed up a hollow for nearly a quarter of a mile and then clambered to the top of the hill and sat down on a rock.

"Maggie?"

"Yes."

"What do you think of Chauncey Wilkes?"

"Oh, Chauncey is all right since he tamed down a bit. He's doing real nicely, don't you think?"

"I don't know. He seems to be. Do you have any idea where he's gone?"

"No, I don't, Bill." Maggie grew suddenly serious. "I'm afraid he tired of our rather dull life here and went back to the city. He came from the city, you know."

"Where'bouts?"

"Back East somewhere," Maggie answered elusively.

"Maggie?"

"Yes."

"I'm head over heels in love with you."

Maggie turned toward him quickly. She looked thoughtfully at his deep, brown eyes.

"Are you really, Bill?" she asked anxiously. Something in her voice made Bill's heart leap vigorously.

"Am I really?" He grasped her hand.

"Maggie, I want you so bad I have to sit up nights to keep from talking about it in my sleep."

He said it so earnestly Maggie didn't dare to laugh.

"Will you marry me, Maggie?"

Maggie was sorely tempted to ask for time to think it over. For a little while she said nothing whatever. She liked Bill, but she had never thought of marrying him. Suddenly she made up her mind to settle the matter once and for all right then.

"I'm sorry, Billy," she said simply, and she was—dreadfully sorry for him.

"Sorry? For what, Maggie?"

"For you, Bill, that you love me that way. I can't marry you."

"Why, Maggie?"

"Because I don't love you." Why did he persist in pressing the matter? She did not want to hurt him, and her words seemed terribly harsh and direct. She thought to take off the edge a little. "I like you, oh, ever so much, but don't you understand, Billy, I don't like you that way."

A sudden fear gripped Bill's heart.

"Maggie?"

"Yes."

"Do you like Chauncey that way? You've been with him a lot."

Maggie was silent for a time, then she answered softly: "I'm afraid so, Billy."

Bill Howle sat for a long time, staring down into the hollow out of which they had climbed. Maggie didn't know what to do, so she just sat and stared down in the hollow too.

"Well," he said at last, rising to his feet, "Chauncey will be back in about a month. He told me before he left. Think it over, Maggie, think it over."

They descended the hill to the road and walked back to Mrs. Vlatchly's. Bill did not go in. Instead he untied his horse by the gate and drove home, packed his grip, and went to Boise. Maggie had feared that he was learning to think too much of her. She was glad now the affair was over and past. She hoped sincerely that he would forget the matter as speedily as possible. But Maggie didn't know all there was to know about Bill Howle.

III.

At a hotel in Boise, Bill saw Chauncey in the midst of a crowd of sporty-looking chaps, laughing, smoking, and having a time in general. Bill avoided him and went up to his room. After a bit he was roused by the sound of voices and loud laughter in the adjoining room. The rooms were separated by a narrow hall. The transits were open, and Bill had no difficulty hearing what was going on.

"Well, Chaunce, old walrus, where you been the last couple of lifetimes? Now that the crowd's gone, spill me a bit of private information about yourself. Still handling other people's valuables?"

"Soft pedal a bit. There's no use advertising this conversation to the general public."

"Excuse my thoughtlessness. I've been out of the danger zone so long I'm growing bold like a Republican politician. Well, Chaunce, what's the last good gag you pulled?"

"To tell the truth, Spud, since I pulled

that parlor robbery in Chicago, the time Flora Reece got sent over, I haven't done much of anything in that line."

"Laying low, eh? Well, that little trick made you about as popular as an Irish rebellion. I don't blame you for takin' a prolonged vacation. Chicago never slept for six nights after that, and they postponed the mayor's reception for darned near two months."

Chauncey laughed. "I've kinda pulled out of the old game permanent like, Spud. I like amusement, but not so much excitement. Gettin' old and mossy."

"You on the straight and narrow? Ho, ho; that is a good one."

"Fact, though. I came West on a freight, same night of the hold-up, and hit for the hills. Been mining and spent a year in the forest service—makin' a good livin' and no worry."

After Chauncey's warning to soft pedal they had been talking in subdued tones, and Bill considered it not in the least ill-mannered under the circumstances to open his door quietly and slip out in the hall by Chauncey's door.

"Well, I'll be damned!" ejaculated Chauncey's companion. "You never heard then that Flora broke jail and made a clean getaway about a month before her trial come off?"

"No"—with a touch of interest. "You don't say so. Where'd she go to?"

"Darned if I know. Beat it off somewhere. Never heard from her since. You and Flora were pretty thick for a while, weren't you?"

"Oh, so-so. Flora was about the best little teammate I ever worked with. I'm sure glad to know she flew the coop before they gave her the T. B."

"Let's go take in that scrap to-night," suggested Chauncey. There was a scuffle in the room, and Bill slipped back and closed his door softly. He flopped down on the edge of the bed, with a head full of information and jumbled ideas that would have done credit to old Mrs. Wilowbrook, Pine's most formidable and talented medium of publicity.

"And all that cuss is got to do is ask her, and Maggie 'll be tied up to a thievin'

criminal for life. Not by a damned sight! I'll see him in hell first."

The next morning Bill started back to Pine. That was Wednesday. It was Thursday before he arrived. At first he intended spilling his information broadcast when he got home. But he didn't like the idea, and by and by thought better of it. Then it occurred to him to call the sheriff at Boise and have Wilkes arrested and turned over to the authorities at Chicago. Finally he decided to keep mum until Chauncey came back to Pine, and then notify the sheriff at Mountain Home, and have him arrested right there at home where Maggie and the rest of the folks could get the whole benefit of it.

Bill didn't like this plan either, but he let it rest for several days. Then he got to thinking about Chauncey trying to go straight, and what a dirty trick it would be to catch him up and send him to the penitentiary anyhow. That would only make a bad matter worse. If the fellow wanted to go straight, give him a chance.

Bill had always preached that. Here was a chance to practise it. But that was no reason why Maggie should suffer the shame and disgrace of having a criminal for a husband. Bill decided to handle the matter himself and see that Chauncey was vamoosed without further devilment.

Then Mr. Wilkes arrived from Mountain Home. With him came six two-wagon freight-outfits, all loaded with boxes. The following two weeks Chauncey was as busy as a family of ants after somebody has kicked a hole in their hill. He worked early and late, hammering, sawing, planing, painting, and what not. At last he abated the curiosity of the public by hanging out a large sign before a building that had long been empty. The sign read:

WILKES & COMPANY
General Merchandise
Groceries

Having set himself up in business, Chauncey turned his attention to other matters. He met Bill in the post-office.

"Well, Howle," he greeted, "how'd you come out?"

"Probably like you will. Listen, Wilkes, I know a volume about you. Maggie's too damned good for you, and if you don't let up I'll see you're put where you'll have to."

"Let's talk about it more private. Say over at my store. Nobody ever comes in there yet."

They walked over to the store.

"Now," said Chauncey, "what do you know about me?"

"A plenty." And Howle related the incident at the hotel in Boise.

Chauncey seemed altogether too unconcerned about the matter to satisfy Bill's romantic nature.

"Fact is, Bill, there is a lot of truth in what you say. Maggie is too good for me, but it takes a good woman like her to make a man out of a skunk like me. I don't see any other way out of it except to marry Maggie Bills, if she'll stand for it."

"You'll not marry Maggie Bills while I'm here."

"Maybe not, Scream. But then maybe I'll do it some time when you're not here."

And thus the matter stood for a couple more weeks, and then the populace of Pine crawled out of bed one fine morning to hear that Chauncey Wilkes and Maggie Bills were going to be married. Folks had waited a long time for something like that to happen. The news spread like wildfire. Then, to cap the climax, Maggie and Chauncey set the wedding for the next Sunday, only five days off, for neither saw any necessity in prolonging the agony.

That night Bill Howle stalked into Chauncey's store, his shoulders square and erect, his chin set with determination.

"Chauncey," he snapped, "if you're any kind of a man, you'll drop this business here and now. You won't tie that girl up to a life of crime like yours. Go back to your Flora Reece, and leave good women alone."

"Can't do it, Bill. Too late to back out now."

"Then damn you, I'll make ye!"

Bill peeled off his coat and squared himself before Chauncey.

"Listen," interjected Chauncey. "If we fight here, somebody 'll come in and stop us. Supposin' we walk out where it's kinda lonesome like, and you can get me buried before anybody finds out I'm missing."

Bill stared at him suspiciously. For the life of him, he couldn't understand Chauncey Wilkes. Together they left the store and walked for half a mile down the road. Then they turned into a field, and after hiking off several rods came to a stop by an old log which the spring floods had left stranded there.

The moon shone brightly and illuminated the country with a crisp, yellow light.

IV.

BILL tossed his coat on the log and waited for Chauncey to do the same.

"Sit down a minute, Bill. There ain't no particular hurry about this business. Sit down, and let's talk about it a little."

"Talk nothin'!" Bill flopped down on the log. "What the dickens you stallin' about?"

Chauncey ignored this fit of peevishness.

"So, honest to God, Bill, you don't think I ought to marry Maggie?"

"I certainly don't!"

"Well—maybe you're right." For a long time Chauncey sat in silence. Then he spoke up again. "Somehow I can't agree with you, Bill. But I'll tell you what I'll do. I'll scrap it out with you. If you lick me I'll pull up my stakes and quit and leave Maggie. If I lick you, then I'll marry Maggie, and you keep your mouth shut for her sake. See? Is that a bargain?"

Bill thought it over. "It is," he announced.

Chauncey stripped off his jacket. The two men stood confronting each other.

"Now, do your darnedest," said Chauncey. "This is for Maggie's sake. Let her go!"

At the word Bill rushed and swung a ripping uppercut under Chauncey's jaw. Chauncey kicked up his heels and landed on his back. Like a streak he bounded to his feet and came at the elusive Bill with

a barrage of cutting wallops. Bill guarded well, and before three minutes were up slipped in another blood-curdling smash over Wilkes's right eye that swung him spinning like a top.

The blow seemed to be just the proper medicine to set Chauncey going. For five minutes they fought like demons, holding open and crashing blow after blow on each other's blood-stained and lacerated faces. Then Bill rushed in and clinched. They tumbled to the ground and rolled and wrestled until both were so tired they could hardly move. Bill quit taking any aggressive measures and just clinched on to Wilkes and hung there.

At last they lay motionless.

"Had enough?" asked Chauncey.

"Hell, no!"

"What say, we rest up a bit and see if we can't settle this the next time."

They unclinched and, stretching out on the grass, relaxed for an hour. Bill actually dozed off toward the end of the period. Chauncey shook him.

"Better wind this up, hadn't we?"

They got up and faced each other.

"You say the word this time," said Chauncey. "I talk too slow. You danged near knocked me out before I finished last time."

"Then go!" yelled Bill, rushing at his foe with another mighty swing of his right. But this time Chauncey was not there.

"I got your number, kid!" he cried, and placed a five-hundred-pound wallop on the back of Bill's neck. Bill dug his nose an inch in the ground and picked himself up cautiously. Wilkes waited until he was fully on his feet and balanced. In a flash he wished he hadn't. Bill piled two quick

blows over his heart, and Chauncey sank to his knees. He was up again, and from then on the fight became one of steady punishment.

They clinched, broke, battered, and clinched again. Then of a sudden Chauncey swung a mighty left to Bill's neck again, and Bill stretched out unconscious on the grass. Chauncey waited nearly fifteen minutes for him to come to. By that time he began to feel uneasy. Picking his erstwhile enemy up in his arms, he stumbled down to the creek. After a little application of cold water Bill opened his eyes. But he was too far gone to make any comments.

Chauncey let him lie and rest for an hour. It was getting near daylight.

"Better get in and patch up," he ventured finally, "before our Pine dailies start a search, hadn't we?"

Bill crawled to his feet. He certainly was licked. It didn't take a Boston logician to convince him of the fact either. He was thoroughly licked. But it had been a fair fight, and he had given his word to keep his mouth shut. Poor Maggie!

They plodded wearily back to town.

"Better come up to my room. It's nearer than your place," Chauncey suggested.

Bill followed him. They washed and massaged their torn and bruised faces, and they lay down side by side to sleep until morning—late in the morning.

"You're keepin' your mouth shut, ain't ye?" reminded Chauncey as they stretched out on the bed.

"Yep."


"Then I'll tip you a bit of information to help you. You see, Bill, Maggie is Flora Reece."



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Where All Trails End

Part VI

by Theodore Goodridge Roberts

Author of "The Wasp," "Two Shall Be Born," etc.

CHAPTER XXII.

TIME.

DAVE BARKER emerged from the brush into Starling's field of vision.

He walked circumspectly, with up-raised hands, and his face was immobile and expressionless. His eyes did not meet those of his partner. A tall, powerfully built man followed at his heels, carrying two rifles—Dave Barker's and his own. Barker halted beside his partner. Neither made any movement to lower his hands.

Dazed though he was by the sudden turn that events had taken, Starling felt an instinctive and compelling curiosity regarding his captors. In the firm lines of Victor Kent's clear-cut face he found no indication of the criminal or man of violence. Kent regarded Barker and Starling with coldly impersonal gray eyes, whose expression was neither friendly nor inimical. He spoke easily, in the tones of one who was accustomed to giving commands, and he knew that he was master of the present situation. He addressed the deputy sheriff.

"Promise me that neither you nor your companion will pull a gun until I have talked to you, Barker," he said, "and I'll let you drop your hands."

"I promise," replied Dave Barker in a flat, expressionless voice.

John Starling only nodded his head. The moment was one of peril for both of them. It seemed to him that their lives might depend upon the next words spoken, yet fear was not the sensation which dominated him, but rather a hectic interest in the action that was unfolding before him, and a curiosity as to the next stage of its development. He felt also chagrin at the ease of their capture. In this meeting with Kent and his wife the plans that they had formed and discussed by many camp-fires were rendered futile by the reversion of the positions of the actors. The scene was well played, he thought, but the rôles were badly mixed. At Kent's direction they seated themselves side by side, but three feet apart, upon the loaded sled. Victor and Flora continued to stand, with rifles ready.

This story began in the *Argosy-Allstory Weekly* for December 17.

"You men realize how things stand," Victor said. "We could shoot you and take your dogs and outfit. You can see that. They would be invaluable to us. We have lost our dogs, and are short of grub—I have a chewed shoulder. But we do not want to shoot you two."

"Much obliged," murmured Barker.

"If I were the murderer you think me, Barker, I'd as soon shoot you as Swithen, or any one else. Have you thought of that?"

The deputy sheriff met Kent's eyes squarely. His voice was sullen, but held no fear.

"It don't matter to us officially what sort of a murderer you are," he said. "And we're here officially, as I reckon you know."

"You could be dead in more ways than officially if we pulled a trigger, Dave Barker. But that is what we don't intend to do. I believe that there is no need for it now, if you will be reasonable. Time is what I need—not your lives. And I suppose that your lives are of more value to you two than the little time that I want."

"Time? What d'ye mean by time?" questioned the deputy sheriff uncomprehendingly. "You have cost us plenty of that already."

"I judge from my map that we are about seven or eight days from Mooseyard, with good dogs and good luck. What do you think?"

"I reckon that's about right."

Victor nodded. His voice was more friendly now and a humorous light had crept into his eyes, so that John Starling, though troubled, felt danger passing, and admiration for his captors growing. Dave's attitude of sullen and argumentative defiance pleased him. The old-timer was certainly game. John listened attentively to Kent's words, and kept an eye on the girl and the gun she held so lightly.

"Yes," continued Victor. "Well, the idea is that I don't want to be in Mooseyard so soon as that. Fourteen or fifteen days would suit us better."

"We ain't runnin' this show to suit you. We represent the law."

Flora laughed, and it was a laugh that gave John Starling a shock of surprise.

"You are not running it at all, Mr. Barker," she said, "and perhaps—if my husband proves too considerate to teach you reason—you will be taught reason by me. You needn't stare. I mean it."

"Good Lord!" exclaimed the deputy sheriff, continuing to stare. "Would ye shoot a man, Miss Scott?"

"Of course—an unreasonable man," she replied.

"I believe you, Miss Scott," said Dave slowly, then turned his eyes to Victor. "What d'ye want the time for?"

"Perhaps you will know that some day, Barker," replied Victor. "As yet I have not even told my wife. Two weeks more away from Mooseyard, instead of one, won't make any difference to either of you, your duty, or your reward—unless a vast difference for the better. Give us your words of honor that we shall all remain here in our camp for seven more days, and we will hand our rifles and pistols over to you, here and now. I feel sure that you will agree to this."

Dave Barker turned inquiring eyes to his partner. John saw that there was no alternative. The proposal was a strange one, but John did not waste time in searching for the reason why Victor Kent should voluntarily surrender himself for seven days' grace when he appeared to have them completely in his power. Chance was dealing them some strange cards, and his present hand was absorbing. The reward would be theirs—at least so Kent had promised, and he looked like a man who would keep his word. Kent was willing to accept their words of honor in a vital matter, so John felt safe in accepting Kent's. He nodded his assent.

"We will accept your terms, Mr. Kent," said the deputy sheriff, "though they ain't exactly regular or legal. I knew you are a gentleman, even if you are a murderer, and John Starling and I keeps our promises when we makes them. I reckon you know that there's five hundred dollars reward on your head, Mr. Kent."

"I knew there was a big reward, Barker. And you will get it, or rather your share of it. Well, we will go to our camp, where you will find some one who will be relieved

but embarrassed by the sight of you two. When we have received a similar promise from him we shall hand over our arms and become your prisoners, or rather Captain Farley's, as he will be in command.

"Captain Farley!" exclaimed Dave in astonishment. "You don't mean to say you've caught him? Good Lord!"

"He will be getting lonely, so we'd better hurry back. You men will walk ahead. Follow those tracks to the next clearing."

The procession moved in single file along the trail that led upward through the brush and past the spot where Dave Barker had been ambushed. Dave was in the lead with John Starling five paces behind him. Close to the tails of John's snow-shoes walked Victor, still carrying his two rifles. Flora followed beside the lead dog of the team which drew the loaded sled.

Ten minutes later they emerged into the clearing where the camp was located. At a word from the girl Dave and John seated themselves upon the sled. She remained standing, and both men knew that her watchful blue eyes were upon them. They sat stiffly at attention and made no attempt to communicate with each other.

The knowledge that his superior officer, Captain Farley of the Junction Post, had by some trick fallen into Kent's hands, and was therefore in the same equivocal position as himself, relieved John of the last of his lingering doubts as to the acceptance of the terms of Kent's surrender. It took the responsibility from his shoulders. It was one thing for the deputy sheriff to yield to the demands of necessity, but considering himself the representative of the force, John had been sorely troubled in mind. Yet he had seen no alternative to the acceptance of the plan which would bring about a successful termination to the long pursuit—save, possibly, a bullet in the head. He wondered greatly what purpose had actuated Kent's request for the seven days' delay in the return to Mooseyard.

Victor continued on to the camp in the snow, and the interview with Fraser Farley. The friendship that had existed between the two men had been genuine, but passive rather than active in its nature. He wondered whether his understanding of the

captain's personality was as comprehensive as he had believed it to be.

He found Farley staring blankly before him at the snow wall of his prison. Polite greetings were exchanged, and Victor bent forward to give the smoking fire a moment of necessary attention. Farley had been very silent since his capture the afternoon before. He had answered any attempts at conversation politely but laconically, and appeared deeply depressed over his misfortune.

Passion and self-condemnation still smoldered within him, but his voice was cold and his face a pale unlined mask. Perhaps Flora understood Farley's emotions better than did her husband, but she had not detailed to Victor the conversation that had transpired when Farley had found her alone in the camp after many days of searching. She had quietly done all that was possible to relieve him of the discomforts of captivity. Occasionally she had felt his eyes upon her, but she had not lifted hers to any trespassing upon the privacy of his thoughts.

Farley accepted, without enthusiasm, Victor's offer of a cigaret. When Victor had lighted it for him and taken a few deep puffs upon his own he proceeded to state his proposition. He could see that Farley was puzzled and that his interest was aroused.

"I promise you that there shall be no attempt at escape," he said. "I know that it is not usual for the 'criminal' to arrange the details and time of his capture, but this has been an unusual case from start to finish, and it is only up to you to decide whether you wish to remain our prisoner for as long as I may consider necessary, or whether you would reverse the positions for the fortnight."

"You're a strange fellow, Kent," said Farley, his eyes searching the smiling, open face of the other in an attempt at analysis that his weary brain was unable to second. "Perhaps you're insane—you don't look it."

"At least there is a sound method in my madness. No, there is a very good reason behind my present request, and there was a very good reason for everything I did

while I was in Mooseyard—and for my leaving Mooseyard when I did.”

“And for your involving Flora—pardon me—your wife in the consequences of your actions?”

A cold flash of anger gleamed in Victor's eyes and the smile left his lips. He rose to his feet and his next words were spoken in a hard voice that was unfamiliar to Fraser Farley.

“The best,” he said. “But that is no concern of yours, captain. You are here officially. Do you refuse or accept the terms of my offer of surrender?”

Captain Fraser Farley flushed red to the edge of his fur cap, and he bowed his head in acquiescence.

“I can only accept,” he said.

His thoughts were bitter, and at the time the fact that his failure in official duty was being transformed into a success that would bring him praise gave him little comfort. A week of inaction under these conditions appeared intolerable to him.

Victor released his hands and feet and told him briefly of the capture of the deputy sheriff from Mooseyard and the constable, and of their agreement to his demand for time. The incident filled Fraser Farley's mind with fresh wonder at the success which seemed ever to attend the footsteps of the dominant man who had been his friend and his rival, and who would now be his prisoner. Even this last rôle seemed to be attended with no aspect of failure for Kent.

When the three representatives of the law were united Victor returned the rifles and revolvers of which he had deprived them and completed this stage of his surrender by handing over to Captain Farley his own rifles and revolver. He felt great affection for these weapons, and his mind retained vivid pictures of the occasions on which they had served him well since that long-awaited dawn on the junction trail weeks before. Flora retained the automatic pistol that was her personal property.

Farley realized that he was now in command of the party, which consisted of two subordinates, a prisoner, and the prisoner's wife. He issued the necessary orders for the guarding of the prisoner, who was to

be under open arrest until the commencement of the return trip to Mooseyard, and for the preparation of the midday meal. Barker was detailed for the first guard duty.

Before an hour had passed their number was increased by the arrival of Constable Morrison. He hailed them from the edge of the clearing, where he had been standing for some minutes watching the interesting events which he did not understand. He was very puzzled, and even Captain Farley's concise explanation of affairs did not seem to clear his mind of bewilderment. He did not question his superior officer, however. He was despatched immediately to the place where he had left the team, and returned quickly, with the dogs following at his heels. When he had eaten his dinner the captain set him to work with an ax among the tall trees beyond the clearing.

Victor felt no depression of spirits, though much still hung in the balance to be lost or gained at the whim of chance, and for a while he could take no active part in the game. The watch kept upon him was strict, and he knew that at any sign of a suspicious movement on his part the watchers would use their firearms, but his captivity was not irksome. He was allowed to converse with Flora, and for the present Farley avoided him, for which he was grateful.

He had a deep store of patience on which to draw, and he knew that his plans were well arranged and well timed. He could guess the fears and uncertainties that must be raging tumultuous warfare in the mind of the girl, who was still near him, as she had been through all his dangers, and again he was lost in silent admiration of the strength of her spirit and her love. She had not questioned him save with her eyes, and he wished beyond all else for the moment that he might tell her everything—lay bare his secret motives and his hopes.

“I have had to alter my schemes, dear.” He spoke in a low tone that could not reach the ears of the guards. “But the game is still in my hands—our hands. I have been playing for time, and I think that the fortnight which Farley has promised me will be more than sufficient for my needs. Flora, I swear before God that it is a torture to

me not to be able to justify myself to you with the facts that are in my possession, but until my work is completed I cannot."

"Nothing you could tell me would strengthen my faith in you, Victor. You have told me that what you did was necessary and your duty. And I do not wish to know more until you are free to tell me more. I know that it is something big and glorious for which you are working, and it has been wonderful to me to think that I could help you in that work. I have helped, haven't I, Victor?"

For some time they talked together in low voices. Dave Barker and John Starling were never more than a few feet from the fire by which they sat, but they made no effort to overhear what was being said by Kent and his wife. Dave was silent and deeply puzzled by the culmination of the pursuit. John's only remark, made in an undertone to the deputy sheriff, called forth no response.

"Four into five hundred is one hundred and twenty-five. Don't look like such a mighty big fortune after all, do it, old-timer?"

CHAPTER XXIII.

IN THE GRASP OF CIRCUMSTANCE.

THERE were only a few men in Mooseyard who had at any time considered themselves friends of Edmund Scott. They were the flotsam deserted by the retreating tide of prosperity on a barren shore. In the days of prosperity they had cultivated the society of the banker as good business men should always do, but they had found him unresponsive and retiring, with his spare time occupied by interests that held little meaning for them.

But when the first excitement over the murder of Hiram Swithen had subsided into a spirit of tense waiting for the return of the posses his figure walking its undeviating route from the little house to the bank and from the bank to the house, at unvarying hours, was the object of much curious and sympathetic observation, and his affairs were discussed from many angles in Jones's Hotel and in the general store.

"I'll tell ye he's a fine man, is Edmund Scott," said Bill Jones in a loud voice that was attuned for carrying its declarations above the racket and turmoil of a well-advanced evening in the Cobalt Bar. "But he can't stand it. Mark my words, he's breaking up, even though he don't show it. Mr. Swithen was a friend o' his, and Kent was a friend o' his, and his daughter was all he cared about outside the bank, I reckon."

McKay knocked the ashes from his pipe and rose to go. He buttoned his fur coat and pulled his cap down about his ears.

"I'm sorry for Scott," he said, "but there isn't anything we can do to help him. I dropped in at his house the other evening, just to pay a social call, but he didn't seem to want to talk—at least not about what you'd think he'd be most interested in. He had a far-away look in his eyes, but he usually did anyway, and he was always quiet. I don't think he's taking the thing as hard as you think, Jones. Anyhow, he brought it on himself, I guess. He made a lot of that Kent."

Robinson, who occupied his usual chair against the wall and outside of the circle of yellow light shed by the hanging oil-lamp, made no comment, but his whisky-fuddled brain still held a clear memory of the visit that he had paid to the house of Edmund Scott a few nights before. He had made no attempt to talk of the murder, for it did not greatly interest him, but had sat for an hour in a comfortable easy chair across the hearth from the man whom he had once met every day as a business acquaintance, but of whom he had seen or thought little for a long time. Edmund Scott had talked a little, on what subjects Robinson could not recollect, and they had smoked.

Robinson was not observant, so he had failed to read the signs of suffering and strain that were engraved unobtrusively but inevitably upon the countenance of the banker. The eye of a trained character analyst would also have found there indications of determination and will-power somewhat foreign to that environment. But these things had escaped the visitor. He had come only with kindly motives, had

been received as a friend, and had said good night early in the evening and walked home under the snapping winter starlight with a mind somewhat freed from the sullen, sodden despair that usually darkened it. He had not gone again. Almost every evening he found his way to the hotel and remained till late, almost unheeded by the other occupants of the broken armchairs around the stove, and paying very little attention to the news which was discussed or the stories which were told.

A few others had attempted to discuss the affair which held the general interest of the community with the banker, some impelled by motives of curiosity, some of pity, but those who had come to the house had been warded off by Julie, and those who had sought him in the bank usually found him absorbed in financial calculations, and quite apparently only to be approached upon matters of business.

The coroner's inquest was held in a long, low, log-walled building which served on every municipal occasion when it was necessary that two or more citizens should be gathered together. Upon the pine platform that occupied one end of the structure occasional troupes of professional entertainers did their acts, inwardly cursing the luck that made it necessary for them to visit a "dead" town. At long intervals the hall was filled with the golden, if often ungrammatical, oratory of provincial politicians. At other times it had served as a court-house. Here Edmund Scott came on the evening of the inquest and gave his brief testimony without emotion. His answers to the few questions that were asked him seemed to come mechanically from his lips, and it seemed as if only a small portion of his mind were occupied with what he said, and the rest were either dead or intent upon some matter foreign to the occasion. At the coroner's request he inspected the body of the dead man and identified it as that of Hiram Swithen. Some wondering glances followed him to the door when he was dismissed.

One gusty afternoon in late January two strangers entered the International Bank, after having carefully knocked the dry snow from their overshoes on the stone step.

Probably Edmund Scott was the only man in Mooseyard who was not already aware of their arrival there. Both these men were well dressed and polished in manner. Their business was quickly transacted, but they were in no hurry to end the interview, and the banker, to his mild surprise, soon found himself conversing quite freely with them, and in possession of their names and business addresses, though not of the object that had brought them to Mooseyard.

The slighter of the two men, whose thin, anemic face seemed an inadequate setting for his strong, mobile mouth and his piercing eyes, was Alexander Dodson. It was he who did most of the talking and who introduced himself and his friend, Mr. Lee Smith, whom he seemed to expect the banker to know by reputation. Mr. Smith said less, but imparted to trite remarks concerning the weather or the lumber market or the uncomfortable conditions of railway travel a vague impressiveness. His deep, rich voice seemed attuned for personal confidences and for the discussion of big deals. His neatly trimmed, tapering beard and grave eyes gave him the appearance of a professional man—a lawyer or a doctor. When they left his handshake was genial.

"We will see you again, I feel sure, Mr. Scott," he said.

"Of course we will, of course we will, sir," said his companion briskly. "We would have to come here for business reasons, if not for others. Things may keep us in this town five or six days, or even a week, and Smith and I certainly couldn't go that long without visiting a bank."

They left little impression upon the banker's mind, but they came again the next morning, and this time their talk was chiefly concerned with the murder and the murderer—Victor Kent. They had read of the case in Montreal papers and been much interested. They found Edmund Scott uncommunicative upon this subject, and when he learned that both the principals in the crime were personal acquaintances of the banker, Lee Smith, with an appearance of great concern, turned the talk upon other lines. Edmund Scott was very glad when they left and he was able to return to the study of a complicated finan-

cial report. He hoped that they would not annoy him with further disturbing calls.

The International Bank was not the only place where Dodson and Smith made vigorous inquiries into the details of the murder, and they had no difficulty in finding men who were willing to tell all the little that they knew concerning Swithen and Kent, to throw in their own opinion of the affair, and to repeat the whole story upon the slightest provocation.

Dodson and Smith themselves aroused much comment, and were the subject of much idle speculation. The theory propounded by Bill Jones on the second evening after their arrival to his usual audience was pretty generally accepted, and seemed well borne out by the appearance and manner of the strangers.

"Mr. Dodson and Mr. Smith is detectives, boys, mark my words," he said with a gesture of a pale, fat hand. "They've been sent up here from Ottawa to get the dope that will hang Kent. They're sharp, they are, and they're getting what they come after. That man Dodson talked to me for half an hour this morning, and I guess I was able to give him a tip or two. 'Mr. Jones,' he said to me, 'what you tell me may be very valuable.'"

Further discussion of these interesting visitors was cut short by the arrival of the gentlemen themselves. The rooms which they occupied were immediately above the hotel parlor, and as the construction of the Cobalt was not of the solidest, Jones well knew that anything said in the parlor might be easily overheard. So with a frown and a shake of the head he closed the topic for the time being.

Three days later Captain Farley brought his party into Mooseyard. He was well aware of the excitement that would flame through the town on his arrival, so he had halted his team some two miles short of their destination in the middle of the afternoon and waited till darkness had gathered and thickened to night among the trees before continuing his way. A heavy snow was falling, and men and dogs were whitened by the soft flakes that hurried down through the windless air. It was still early when they reached the outskirts

of the town. Yellow light glowed dully through frosted panes and falling snow.

The deputy sheriff's house, which was their first objective, stood near the northern end of the main street, but they had not gained it before they were discovered, and to Farley's annoyance men came running from the houses and muffled shouts came to his ears. Despite the darkness his efforts at secrecy had failed, and the steadily increasing group of men who awaited them by Dave Barker's door seemed in no doubt as to their identity.

"It's Farley. Has he got him?"

"Yeh. Hurry up. There he is on the sled."

The dogs were drawn to a halt, and in obedience to instructions previously received the two constables, preceded by Dave, marched the prisoner hurriedly up the steps and into the house, where for a moment Dave's flash-light gave the only illumination. Flora followed close behind them, and Farley, the last to enter, closed the door on the unsatisfied and muttering mob. In that fraction of a moment that he stood upon the steps his keen ears caught fragments of sinister sentences that startled him.

Some one was demanding a rope. A familiar voice shouted, "Rush them!" Another, "Wait, durn ye—d'ye want to be filled with lead? There's time enough."

Handcuffed now, and a prisoner in fact as well as in name, Victor was hurried to a small room on the second story. His farewell to his wife had already been said, and when his outer clothes had been removed he was left alone and the door locked upon him. A lamp had been stood in one corner of the room, and by its light he made an unhurried examination of his cell. The small window was lightly barred, the walls were bare but clean; the only furniture was the iron cot upon which he was at present seated. He could hear the murmurs of the crowd faintly rising from below, but after momentary consideration of his surroundings he dismissed his present position from his mind and became deeply engrossed in thought. His mental calculations seemed not to give him complete satisfaction, for his brows were puck-

ered and the hard line of his mouth bore evidence to suppressed impatience. Twenty minutes passed before any one approached the room. Then he heard feet in the passage, the key was turned in the lock, and Farley entered. The captain was more visibly perturbed than was his prisoner. He looked around the room.

"We will make things a little more comfortable here to-morrow, Kent," he said. "That is, Barker will. I am going right on to the junction to-night to wire headquarters and Judge Robson, and send down the men who are at the post. Those men outside are in a bad mood. I don't understand it. I spoke to them and quieted them down, so you are safe so long as you remain here under a guard. They trust my word, and I have promised not to move you from this house until the day of the trial."

"I thought my Mooseyard friends seemed anxious to make a warm demonstration of welcome," Victor smiled. "I'm afraid their feelings are easily played with. But don't worry, captain—I shall be safe enough. I have one request to make. Will you permit me to send a letter to be mailed at the junction by your own hand?"

"Certainly; but I must read the letter. I shall be leaving in ten minutes."

He opened the door and called to Dave for paper and an envelope. When these were brought he unlocked the handcuffs that held Victor's wrists, and gave him his fountain pen. He stood by the door while Victor hurriedly wrote a short note with the pad held upon his knee. Victor tore out the sheet and extended it to the captain, who took it in silence. He read it twice, but could make nothing of it. He studied the envelope, which was by this time addressed.

"Well, I will mail it, Kent," he said, "but it is a strange letter to be writing under the circumstances."

"Thanks, captain," Victor replied. "It will bring me help from a friend, though it appears futile to you. Another thing: from what you say I think that the trial will be hurried?"

"In my wire to the judge I will make it plain that the preliminary hearing must be proceeded with at the earliest possible

date. That may be within five days. Inspector Dunne and Judge Robson should be here Saturday. I shall wait for them at the junction. In the mean time I have left instructions with Barker that he is to use his discretion in allowing you to receive visitors. Dave can be trusted, and I know that there are only certain people whom you will wish to see."

"They will not be many, Farley."

A minute later he was once more alone. The captain had assured him that he would escort Flora home and had wished him a formal good night. Beyond the thick maple door Starling and Morrison stood guard, and for some time their voices running on in an unintelligible conversation, and the whisper of snowflakes brushing against the window-pane, were the only sounds that he heard. He settled himself to a position of some comfort on the bed and breathed a sigh of enforced resignation. He yearned for his pipe, but evidently smoking was prohibited even in this excuse for a jail. It was hard for his active mind to realize that the plans to which he had devoted such careful thought, and in whose execution his trained mind and hand had been so necessary, had reached a stage in their development where their progress could continue successfully while he was idly kicking his heels in prison. Yet there was still an element of uncertainty, an unknown quantity in the equation that might upset his calculation.

Edmund Scott had finished his evening meal, and from the library came the crackle and murmur of a wood fire that Julie had lighted for his comfort. He had lingered over his meal, though scarcely noticing the food he ate, for the long, silent evening was the period of the day which he dreaded. Then it was that his thoughts were apt to get out of control and go wandering in prohibited territory. He heard muffled footsteps on the veranda, and the opening of the outer door, and he turned to escape from the room before any unwelcome visitor should catch him. But the ring of the door-bell that would bring Julie from the kitchen did not follow. He heard the handle of the door turned, and his heart stood still.

For a moment his face went as pale as it had on that morning when Little Joe Sabatis had found him in that very room. Before his vision had cleared or his ears had caught the accents of his daughter's voice he was aware beyond all doubt of the identity of the person who had entered and was crossing the hall. A white hand moved aside the heavy green curtain on which his eyes were riveted, and Flora stood before him, still clad in her furs and snow-powdered from her toque to her moccasins.

"Dad," she said again in the low, tender voice which had brought him comfort in so many hours of despondency—"dad, will you forgive me?"

For a little while after that the conversation was somewhat disjointed and meaningless. Julie broke in upon it with a scream and immediately subsided into short-lived weeping. Then she quietly withdrew and left them together.

"I must see Victor to-night," said Edmund Scott. "He must have no doubt of my friendship. And there will be things to be done—letters and telegrams to be sent to his friends. I know that he will clear himself of the charge of murdering Swithen, but he is not out of grave danger yet."

"Captain Farley, who is on his way to the junction, had a letter to mail for him," she replied. "I should like to tell you something of what has happened since that night, dad. You will love him and believe in him the more. I have heard that story about Swithen, and soon I shall hear his reasons for what he did. This I know—that it was a matter of duty and necessity; beyond that I have not guessed. That cannot shake my love or my trust. Dad, even if I were to lose him now, after all—well, it would be after so much.

"We have lived and loved, and whatever happens now, the joy of my memories will be so great as to make me forget sometimes the grief of life without him. But I do not fear. Whatever he has done he has done for the right. The game is still to play until it is won or lost—and I know we shall win it. I don't know why he killed Swithen, but I do know that he had to do it—that it was the right thing to do."

Her father tightened his hand upon hers. The vibrant passion of her voice and the intensity of her words touched his heart with the fire of enthusiasm, and stirred to life a deeper admiration for this daughter of his.

"It is early yet, Flora," he said gently, "Tell me all that happened. It will repay me for much loneliness."

Talking quietly but with emotion, she told her father of the flight and of the marriage, of the blizzard and the fight with the wolves. She told the story briefly, but with a reality that brought the dangers and the triumphs vividly home to her listener. She told of the night in Beaver Walsh's cabin, and of the threat of starvation. While he listened Edmund Scott's eyes never left his daughter's face. He felt almost as though he himself had lived those adventurous days. When she ceased to speak he rose to his feet.

"Flora," he said, "we must save him. I am—a failure. I have little money, and no friends or influence beyond this town, but we shall succeed without them. You shall not lose him, Flora. I swear it!"

Five minutes later they were hurrying hand in hand down the palely shimmering street. The lights of the houses were now smothered in the night, and the storm and the light snow already lay deep in the worn paths. They met no one. The men whose appearance had caused no little anxiety to Fraser Farley had dispersed to their homes or gathered in the parlor of the Cobalt to discuss the crime and the criminal.

They reached Dave Barker's house and were admitted by Dave himself, who came to the door lamp in hand. He seemed to be expecting them, and led them immediately to the room where Victor was imprisoned. John Starling, who was on guard, saluted Flora in his best parade manner, for he had a deep respect for the lady who could handle a gun so smartly, and there was much pity for her in his young heart. He still regarded that half-dollar as the primary cause of this termination of the pursuit.

Victor and the older man looked into each other's eyes in silence for the fraction of a second, and were satisfied with

what they read there. Their meeting was that of tried and trusted friends. They seated themselves upon chairs that Dave Barker brought. The deputy sheriff withdrew from the room.

"Flora has told me everything she knows, Victor," said Edmund Scott, "and I honor and admire you—more than I can say. But I did not come to tell you that. I came to ask you what immediate action I can take—what we must do to clear you of this charge. You alone are in possession of the true facts; but I am ready to fight in the dark if you will direct my operations."

"I cannot thank you adequately for the friendship that has endured such a strain, and I know I do not need to ask your pardon," Victor replied, deeply moved by the other's sincerity. "As for the charge of murder, it is unimportant, and neither of you must worry over it. I do not. I have sent a letter that guards against any possibility of danger, and all that we can do is await the trial. There is one gentleman, though, whose testimony I must have on that occasion. Will you send to White-waters and tell Father Quinn that I need him? When he learns that I am in trouble I know that he will come."

"I will write a letter to him to-night," said Flora. "And a swift messenger shall leave with it in the morning. I will make the letter urgent, though I know he will not hesitate a moment. He will be here within four days."

"He has been ill," said her father. "But I believe he is completely recovered now. It is a long time since I have heard anything about him. You have heard of the fire? His church and house were both destroyed."

He told what little he had heard concerning the fire.

"By the way, Victor," he said, "there are two gentlemen staying at the Cobalt—one of them is a lawyer, I believe. You might care to consult him. I know practically nothing about them, and have only met them twice. Dodson and Smith are their names."

"No, I don't wish to consult any lawyer," Victor replied. "But Dodson and

Smith sound interesting. I may have met them at some time. Could you describe them?"

Edmund Scott related what details he had noticed of their appearance, and Victor listened attentively to the very scanty description. It seemed to satisfy him.

"I don't desire to meet them just yet, sir," he said. "But I wish you would cultivate their acquaintance and do your best to hold them in Mooseyard until after the trial. Do not tell them that you spoke to me of their presence. That is all that can be done just now, but it is of the first importance."

Late the same night Long Alec Javet arrived home in a very bad temper. He refused to tell his wife anything about his adventures, and after eating a tremendous meal rolled himself in his blankets, and didn't get out of them for twenty-four hours.

He had had a hard trip with Angus Johnson. The trader had made him do all the work of breaking trail, cooking food, and cutting fire-wood, and had treated him like a slave for seven days. In the evenings by the light of seven camp-fires he had gambled with him, and, contrary to his usual luck, had won steadily—so that at the end of that period Long Alec did not even own the coat on his back and was heavily in debt.

At last Johnson grew disgusted with the chase and with his companion, and decided to return to Crooked River Camp and forget the mythical reward. He told Long Alec what he thought of him before they parted, and the woodsman had no resource but to listen to the other's vivid description of his character, though black rage swelled in his heart.

Johnson gave him enough food—barely enough—to see him through to Mooseyard, but retained Alec's pistol. Long Alec made a swift trip of it with the fear of the trader's wrath constantly hounding him on to greater effort. His wife swore at him for coming home without the reward; but he didn't mind that, for he knew that he could always get the best of her with a dog whip or a cordwood stick. But he had had enough of the whole business of the mur-

der, and showed no great interest when he learned next day that Captain Farley had come in with Kent as his prisoner.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE TRIAL.

THE telegram which Captain Farley despatched from Mooseyard Junction set the machinery of the law into immediate motion, and two days later Judge Robson and Inspector Dunne of the Mounted Police left the train from the south at the "jumping-off" station. Farley was there to meet them. He received their congratulations on his success coldly. In the inner pocket of his tunic he carried at that very moment an envelope containing his formally phrased resignation from the force, to take effect as soon as he could be replaced at the junction post. He intended to hand this to the inspector on the first occasion when they were alone together, and he knew that his mind would not find peace until that ordeal was over. He dreaded the surprise and probable questions that the document would evoke from his superior officer. This step was the result of much thought.

He had had plenty of time for cool thought during that period of grace for which Victor Kent had bargained, and the result was that he had resolved to leave the north and seek new interests among the cities to the south. He did not speculate as to the future. He knew that he would find it hard to break away from his habits of solitude and take up daily intercourse with busy and sociably inclined men—in fact, that it would mean, to a great extent, a remolding of his character; but a strange restlessness urged on him the necessity of this step.

"Farley don't seem much elated over his catch," said the inspector to the judge that evening as they sat together in the latter's room at the Cobalt Hotel. "But he was always a quiet fellow—hard to understand. He is a fine officer, but I shouldn't like to be stationed with him. He did well in France, too."

"What was he doing before the war?"

asked the judge. He spoke absently, for all that day his mind had been occupied with the reviewing and pigeonholing of the miscellaneous facts that had come to him through official reports concerning the case that lay before him.

"He ran some sort of a ranch out West, judge—cattle or horses," the inspector replied. "Must have been by himself a lot, I suppose. This life seems to suit him. Well, good night, judge."

The messenger that Edmund Scott despatched to Whitewaters with his daughter's letter for Father Quinn found the little priest still looking very ill and weak, and still under the charge of Chief Two Bear's aged mother. Victor Kent had been much in Father Quinn's thoughts, and the loss of the paper to which the explorer had attached such great importance had weighed heavily on his mind even after the delirium had left him. Indeed, it was his intention to travel to Mooseyard as soon as he had gained a little more strength, and search there for information in some effort to undo the damage. When he read the letter he was immensely relieved, and his spirits rebounded to something like their old vivacity and alertness.

He ignored all the protests of the squaw who had been his physician, and gave orders to the chief for the preparation of a dog-team that would leave for Mooseyard at daybreak. Chief Two Bear and young Canadian—the Indian whom the priest had saved from death on the night of the fire—insisted on accompanying him. All evening and until the moment of departure in the chill hour succeeding dawn he was excitable and nervous, and at his urging the driver "mushed" the dogs through the soft snow, and the trip was made in record time.

When he had had a long private interview with Victor and a long night's rest under Edmund Scott's roof he felt better than he had since the commencement of his illness. He appeared to await the trial in impatient eagerness. In Edmund Scott he found a congenial friend, and in the banker's library he found much to delight and absorb him, and also to bring back painful memories of his own cherished vol-

umes now long vanished in smoke and ashes. Both men avoided religious discussions, and found enough purely literary battle-fields on which to meet in argument to make their evenings interesting. Father Quinn discovered magazines with articles signed by Victor Kent, and read them with whole-hearted admiration. And he was never weary of talking to Flora about the explorer himself.

Arrangements for the trial were rushed, and it was set for ten o'clock in the morning of the following Wednesday. By the afternoon of Tuesday many outsiders had arrived in the town. They were a mixed lot—trappers and miners to whom the event would be the most thrilling entertainment of the year, perhaps the only break in the long months of monotony. Two news-thirsty reporters from Toronto papers were also in evidence, sociable young men who talked with every one and gave ear to every rumor afloat. Their noblest efforts failed to gain them an interview with either the prisoner or his wife, but the stories that they patched together from the talk of many ready tongues kept them writing far into the night.

Alexander Dodson and Lee Smith were not present in the parlor of the hotel that evening, but they missed very little of the animated talk that went on there. They were good listeners, and what they heard in their room overhead seemed to interest them deeply. What Archie McKay had to say was unintelligible to them, but his voice, vibrant with suppressed excitement, ran on intermittently till midnight and the departure of the last visitor.

The mill-owner was stirring up trouble, but his most passionate efforts seemed incapable of rousing the dormant mob spirit to the point of insane action. The men were not averse to taking justice into their own hands should the judge fail to do his duty, and they were not the type to mind a bit of a rough-house, but they knew that there were four well-armed and well-trained men stationed in the deputy sheriff's house, and the business wore too sinister an aspect for them. So at last they grew angry with McKay, and either ignored him or cursed him to his face.

Early in the morning huge fires were kindled in the three square sheet-iron stoves that heated the court-house. It was a dark, windy day, threatening storm, and little light came through the small, heavily frosted windows. Bracket lamps set at intervals along the unplastered walls were depended on for illumination, and their yellow light battling with the white glimmers of daylight seemed to add a little to the warmth of the room. Rows of wooden benches waited blankly for the opening of the doors. The crowd that filled them when the hour of the trial arrived was a cross-section of northern pioneer life, with a scanty dilution of urban society supplied by Dodson and Smith and the few men whom the sensational nature of the crime had drawn like a magnet from their civilized stamping-grounds.

Judge Robson—a tall, loosely built man with large mouth and nose and a superfluity of skin upon his face that bagged and wrinkled amazingly—entered the building, and seated himself at the desk that occupied the center of the small platform. He was supported on the right and left by Inspector Dunne and Captain Farley. At his entrance the murmur of voices and restless moving of feet and shifting of benches died away to expectant silence. The witnesses had already taken their seats on the chairs reserved for them, and the jury, a rough-looking dozen, were in their place and doing their best to emulate the dignity of the judge and officers of the court.

The side door by which the judge had entered opened again, and Victor was led in by two constables. His expression was grave but undismayed, and his eyes went unhesitatingly to Flora where she sat beside her father among the witnesses. She answered his regard with a brave smile, though her cheeks were pale and her clasped hands moved nervously. She looked often at Victor, and sometimes her glance followed his among the crowd. Always when their glances met, their love proclaimed itself for all the world to see. In a quick, intent survey he searched the faces which peered up at him from the benches with such curiosity. The hard line of his lips twitched for a moment to a smile. He

did not seem at all embarrassed by the focusing of so much public attention upon him.

McKay, seated near the lower end of the hall, scowled sullenly at the prisoner and muttered beneath his breath. Little Joe Sabatis, among the witnesses, grinned back at Victor cheerfully. Little Joe had been in a bad funk up till that moment, but when he found the boss evidently prepared to face the ordeal calmly he pulled himself together and regained something of his usual placidity—though not till the end of the trial did he conquer the lingering fear that he himself was going to be handcuffed and sent away to prison and hard work.

Sam Trent's emotions were under complete control. His lean, dark face was expressionless, but he followed the developments of the case with undeviating attention. The two men whispered together occasionally.

The judge called the court to order, and in formal words charged the prisoner with the murder of Hiram Swithen. His large, heavily lidded eyes watched Victor intently and impersonally, only occasionally dropping to a brief examination of the papers which lay before him on the desk.

"Not guilty," came the instant reply.

There was a stir and a murmur of dissatisfaction at the rear of the hall, instantly quelled by the police constables who were on duty there.

The judge proceeded: "You are charged with the murder of Edward, or 'Beaver' Walsh."

"Not guilty," came the unhesitating answer.

Father Quinn, greatly agitated, seemed upon the point of applauding, but restrained himself. His lips moved rapidly as though he were conversing with himself, and his frail and sunken cheeks were touched with the color of excitement. A few members of the jury laboriously scribbled notes upon the pads provided for the purpose. The first witness was called, and Dave Barker rose to give his testimony.

After a moment of embarrassed tongue-stumbling, he told his story simply and clearly. He described the finding of Swithen's body and all he knew about that, and

then related the details of the finding of the wolf-gnawed bones of Jake Sims, the pedler, near Walsh's cabin. He read the notes from his book, and then proceeded to tell what they had found in the cabin—Beaver Walsh's body, the bullet wounds, and the knife lying by his left hand. The people were thrilled and amazed by his story and hung breathlessly upon every word.

"I reckon Kent had to shoot to kill," the deputy sheriff said, turning his eyes squarely to the judge's face. "Beaver was aiming to knife him, sure. He was a bad actor all around."

"You will please keep to facts, Mr. Barker," said the judge. "The gentlemen of the jury are capable of drawing their own conclusions from those, if we can obtain sufficient of them. Please continue."

Dave Barker told briefly of the long pursuit, of the finding of the two fugitives camped in the Siltok Hill country, and without dogs or food. He told how Kent and the girl had surrendered their firearms without resistance, but did not mention the agreement for seven days extra time. He told how he had found Captain Farley in the camp and how the captain's companion with the team of dogs had joined them that day. When he had hastily concluded his evidence the judge did not immediately dismiss him. He asked him several keen questions. The deputy sheriff seemed somewhat ill at ease under this examination, but he answered the questions satisfactorily after a further consultation of his note-book, and was permitted to resume his seat.

His glance chanced to meet that of Captain Farley and he saw that that officer was greatly embarrassed. Both men instantly shifted their glances, the captain endeavoring to hide his confusion by an intense study of a typewritten report. Flora smiled faintly, and amusement shone in the eyes of Inspector Dunne. The judge summoned Father Quinn to the witness-stand.

He was supported on either side by his two dusky-faced parishioners who had accompanied him from the Indian village. Even his excitement was not strong enough

to overcome the physical weakness from which he suffered, but his eyes were bright, and his high-pitched voice clear and untrembling as he answered the preliminary questions of the court. To his friends—the man on trial and Flora and her father among the witnesses yet to be called—he looked very bent and diminutive as he stood there between the two tall Indians. He told of the arrival of the lovers at his mission and mentioned a private conversation with the prisoner, a confession made to him by the prisoner, and a sealed envelope given into his charge. Then he spoke of the marriage, and an expectant murmur made itself audible from the body of the hall.

Flora had many well wishers among the townspeople gathered there—poor miners' wives whom she had helped when times were particularly hard, and others who knew her only by sight, but whose sympathy and pity were won by the romantic incidents of the flight, her beautiful face, and her brave bearing in court.

"Did you know him for the murderer of Swithen when you married them?" asked Judge Robson.

"I certainly did, your honor," came the priest's instant reply. "And I married them, and gave them my blessing—and I kissed the bride—and I'd be glad to do it all over again. But then the fire destroyed my little church and my house, and with it the letter he gave me, and the marriage register. So you will have to take an old priest's word for these things."

"What do you know of the prisoner? Is Victor Kent his real name? Is he an explorer? By what name did he sign the register?"

"I know his name well enough." Father Quinn spoke almost defiantly. "He told it to me; and he wrote it in the register. It isn't Victor Kent—I'll tell you that much; and when he says I can tell you more, I'll do so, your honor."

Flora started and turned amazed and questioning eyes to her husband. Her father was whispering to her, but she made no answer. Victor met her look unswervingly and with a smile, and she smiled back. The judge's next question rang sharply through the heavy silence of the hall.

"What name did the prisoner sign in the register?"

Father Quinn turned toward the prisoner and received the answer to his unspoken query in an unmistakable shake of the head. The priest shook his at the judge and remained with closed lips. While the judge still waited his reply Victor was whispering urgently to the armed constables at his elbows. For a moment they seemed in doubt and then they stared searchingly in the direction of the door at the farther end of the building. One of them turned and spoke in a low tone to a member of the force who stood directly behind him, and that man made his way down the narrow aisle between the crowded benches and stationed himself at the door. Victor followed his movements coolly.

Judge Robson's face worked with an impatience that he could not keep out of his voice. His heavy brows were drawn together in a scowl and he tapped on the desk with a thick forefinger.

"What is all this quibbling about, Father Quinn?" he almost shouted. "You must answer the question of the court. What is the prisoner's name?"

Again the old priest and Victor exchanged glances.

"Certainly, your honor." At first Father Quinn's tones were propitiatory, but as he continued he, too, seemed to lose his patience. "When my conscience permits my tongue to do so. You must not hurry an old man. Yes, he told me his true name—and he wrote it in the register—but the lady did not see it. But what would she have cared if she had? It was he whom she loved, to be sure, and not his name. But he is also Victor Kent—the real Victor Kent—the explorer. There isn't any other—an able man, your honor. But he is another and a greater person than that, and if I were free to tell you what I know, you wouldn't be sitting there like a silly fool—"

His excited eloquence was interrupted by the crash of an overturned bench and the sudden outbreak of a disturbance in the crowd near the door. Turning instantly Victor saw two men struggling with three members of the force. An automatic was

wrenched from the hand of one and in the same second their resistance appeared to be overcome. The judge cried for order, but for a few minutes the excitement raged high and rough voices clamored. Then a curious silence fell on the hall, and Inspector Dunne, who had hurried to the group of struggling men, made himself heard.

"Who are these men?"

Several voices answered him. They were the city men—Dodson and Smith. The larger man—he of the beard—recommenced his efforts to escape from the constables who held him.

"I know them, inspector," cried Victor. "I am glad to see them here, so hold them tight. My work is done—and well done."

"Silence. Are you mad?" shouted the judge.

"I was never saner in my life—or happier. Look out there. At the door! Watch the little fellow."

He stepped forward, in spite of his guards. Two shots rang out, and Alexander Dodson wheeled half round, tore himself from the constables and collapsed upon the floor. He was dead before the reports had ceased to echo in the close atmosphere of the hall. Women screamed and the confusion burst out afresh. Dragging his guards with him, Victor made his way to Flora, who came forward to meet him. It was a matter of minutes before order was restored. The door had been forced open and the cold, raw air of winter swept sharply and revivingly through the overheated hall. Victor was led back to his place. Flora followed and stood beside him, facing the judge. Victor addressed that official calmly.

"What I have to tell you now, your honor, had better be told before a smaller and less excitable audience than this."

"You will say what you have to say here and now, my man. Remember that you are the prisoner at the bar—on trial for murder."

Victor handed a folded sheet of paper to Captain Farley, who now stood close by him.

"Give that to the judge, please. Read that, your honor." He paused while the

judge perused the page. "Have the pockets of Smith and the dead man, Dodson, searched, and I think you will find duplicates of that document. They will need explanation, I think."

The judge, without comment, handed the paper to the inspector, who studied it with bewilderment written upon his open countenance. In the mean time Captain Farley had himself commenced the search of the pocket of the dead man who lay where he had fallen upon the floor. On of the constables performed the same service for Smith. The big man was still struggling convulsively.

His face worked frantically, but he did not speak. He was as pale as his companion upon the floor. The captain came forward with two pocket-books that had been discovered in the men's clothing and placed them in the hands of the judge; and the judge quickly produced the papers for which he searched. He scanned them hastily and then passed them to the inspector, and together they compared them with the first document. The inspector asked a question, and the judge shook his head. He looked at the prisoner, and Victor saw that he, too, was puzzled.

"Where did you get this paper?" he asked, the anger gone from his voice.

"From Faeter's pocket after I shot him."

"What is that you say?" asked his questioner uncomprehendingly.

"Faeter? What Faeter? Are you mad?" cried the inspector, rising to his feet. "Who are you?"

"I took that paper from the pocket of Karl Faeter after shooting him. For very good reasons he did not use that name here. He called himself Hiram Swithen."

Edmund Scott and Father Quinn were talking together in rapid undertones. The judge seemed bewildered, but determined to forge ahead and reach the truth of the matter by calm questioning. Farley was amazed, and Inspector Dunne could put no further restraint upon his keen excitement. He almost stammered over his next words.

"What do you know of Karl Faeter? Karl Faeter in Canada? He is in Russia."

"He is in hell," said Victor quietly.

The crowd was in a turmoil, and for a moment order was again forgotten, and the judge shouted vainly for silence. But it was only for a moment—they were anxious to hear what else the prisoner would have to tell them.

Only a few of them knew who Karl Faeter was—and none of them knew who Victor Kent was. That was the absorbing question to which they demanded an answer. Father Quinn was on his feet, trembling with weakness and triumph and ignoring the proffered support of his two Indian attendants. His voice was a thin scream, and he shook his finger at the judge and officers.

"This is Charles MacPhey, ye blind old mole of a judge. Charles MacPhey—if ye know who he is; and here you are trying him for murder—for the murder of the vilest and most powerful and most dangerous spawn of the devil ever set free on earth to plot the ruin of states and empires and churches and homes. Charles MacPhey—that's the name he signed in the register."

Father Quinn sank back in his seat exhausted. The inspector rushed to Victor and placed a hand upon his shoulder.

"Is this true?"

"Every word of it is true. And here comes official confirmation, I think."

The man on guard at the door had opened it to permit the entrance of a sergeant of the Mounted Police. He was fur-clad and frosty and his face was red from the slash of the cold. He was breathing heavily and appeared to have come some distance in a great hurry. He headed through the crowd toward the officers standing at the upper end of the hall, saluted, and handed two telegrams, one opened and the other sealed, to Inspector Dunne.

The inspector ran his eye over the open message. Then he ordered his men to clear the hall of all save the witnesses and officials. The order was executed despite indignant protests from the excited and curious general public and from the representatives of the press in particular. One of the young men uncased a folding camera and stationed himself on the opposite side of the street with the intention of securing at all costs at least one snap-shot of the principal

actor in the dramatic court scene when he should emerge. He seemed quite ready to wait an hour in the numbing cold if that should be necessary. Dodson's body was laid upon a bench and covered with a coat. Lee Smith, subdued and handcuffed, appeared to be too dazed with fear to take any interest in the proceedings. He stood with head bowed and shoulders slumped between the constables who guarded him.

CHAPTER XXV.

LADY MACPHEY.

THE unopened telegram addressed to Victor Kent was handed to Victor by a bewildered and respectful constable with the compliments of Inspector Dunne. Judge Robson was completely out of his depth now and the inspector and Captain Farley were running things. The names "Faeter" and "MacPhey" had acted like awakening bugle calls upon the two officers.

Victor read the telegram, smiled and flushed and handed it to Flora. When she had read it she, too, flushed, and the eyes she lifted to his were smiling through the moisture of tears. Heedless of judge and court he stooped and kissed her. Father Quinn was engaged in animated talk with Edmund Scott, who was listening eagerly and at every few words turning to gaze in love and admiration at the pair of whom his friend talked. Little Joe Sabatis did not understand the details of the events that were transpiring around him, but he was perfectly satisfied that things were going well for the boss—his friend—Victor Kent. He surreptitiously nudged Sam Trent, and having borrowed his plug of chewing-tobacco, bit a large chew from it. The constables on duty in the hall strained their ears to catch every word that was spoken.

The inspector read, in a voice thick from excitement, from the slip of yellow paper that he held in his hand:

Work under Victor Kent's orders to finish his great task. Give him full authority and all assistance in your power. The welfare of Canada depends upon his success.

He paused, and then added in a shout:

"This is from Ottawa and it is signed by the Prime Minister of Canada. Your honor"—he turned to the judge—"you have not ordered the release of the prisoner."

"That is apparently unnecessary," said Judge Robson. "I dismiss the charge of murder laid against Victor Kent—or Charles MacPhey."

"The great task of which the telegram speaks is done," said Victor, speaking quietly and holding Flora's hand. "Faeter has been dead for weeks, and we bagged the other two this morning. Their names—well, they don't matter now. Faeter was the force and fire of the three disciples of destruction. They intended to complete the destruction of civilization, as it has already been begun in eastern Europe. They were to meet here—somewhere on this fringe of wilderness—brains, money, and cunning. One of them was a Russian—one a German, who claimed American citizenship—and one called himself an Englishman, and a friend of the people. Two are dead and the other seems safe and helpless enough. I have waited here for them since September. Washington recommended me to London, and London to Ottawa for the job. I spotted Faeter here a month ago and had to kill him, and at the same time—and at the risk of my life—hide my hand so as not to alarm the other two."

He looked once more into the face of the girl beside him and then at the judge and others and continued: "I have been offered the high distinction of knighthood for these recent actions of mine which have caused you so much worry and effort. I cannot accept the honor, for I am an Ameri-

can. What I did was all in the day's work. And I am already rich in honor in the love and trust of this woman, who, knowing no more of my past and my intentions than you did, faced hardship and death—disgrace and exile with me. She never showed in that great test a flicker of fear or doubt. So now, gentlemen, for a moment I accept this high honor from King George—the accolade of knighthood—and I introduce to you my wonderful wife, Lady MacPhey!"

Captain Farley was first with his congratulations. He said little, but he wrung Victor's hand warmly. Judge Robson indulged in some high-flown language and sentiment as he congratulated "Lady MacPhey" on the disclosures of the trial. The inspector's countenance and voice expressed mingled admiration and respect.

"MacPhey! Charles MacPhey!" he exclaimed. "The greatest and surest and most secret of all living officers of any secret service. For years I have heard hints and rumors of your work, sir, and to think that our trails should cross here. I am proud to shake the hand of Charles MacPhey. I never expected to have the chance."

"It's the last chance you'll get, Dunne," said Victor, smiling. "I'll kill MacPhey by Act of Congress; and Victor Kent, the explorer—the scribbler of magazine articles, who has done a greater thing than MacPhey ever dreamed of, shall live forever."

There were joy and triumph and love in his bearing as well as in his words. It was not of his completed task that he thought, but of another goal attained—a goal toward which his whole previous life seemed to him to have been a blind and unconscious searching.

(The end.)

THE ENDLESS SKY

THERE is no end to the sky.

And the stars are everywhere,
And time is eternity.

And the here is over there.
And the common deeds of the common day
Are ringing bells in the far-away.



Perfection Plus by

Rose Pelswick

IT was rumored along Broadway that David Pascal was intending to put on another play, and that he was looking everywhere for a type to play the star part. It was a difficult part, and as yet, no one had been found. And, since to be starred or even merely cast by David Pascal meant absolute recognition and a decided future, every actor had tried to fill the vacancy, but with no success.

In the ways that such things get out, it was known that the play centered about a Jewish family, the head of which was an idealist; one who held that the times are corrupted and man along with them. His daughter runs away and goes on the stage; he denounces her—casts her off, and commands his family to consider her as one who has departed from this life.

The play laid bare with pulsing characterization, the heart of Jewish life and the essence of its very soul; pathos and laughter were intermingled with that rare touch of which only David Pascal was capable. But as yet, for this theory of his of finding a type for the part, none had measured up to the standard of the stern, righteous, magnificent Jewish character.

Two actors, standing on Broadway,

watching the crowds surge by, were discussing the situation.

"I hear that he's been going through the East Side, watching all the men, listening to their talk and trying to get some one who feels all that sort of stuff naturally and by instinct. He's been eating in every restaurant and buying from every push-cart, in the hope of miraculously running across this type," contributed the older; "he's a crank, that's what he is."

The younger man, Murray Edwards, nodded absently.

"I guess he's so particular because it means so much to him—I heard that it's to be a knockout—better than all of his other successes."

The older man agreed gloomily.

"But he's all wrong in this game of going after a type. It's a new idea of his. What he ought to do—and this is my idea—is to take one of the older fellows, and train him to the part—there's nothing in taking one of these desert flowers that have been blushing unseen and putting them on Broadway to grow. My eye, does he expect this character to run up against him and stun him with his realism? It won't work, I'm telling you!"

Again the younger man nodded as if in deep thought.

"Perhaps not—but—"

Over on the East Side, floating with the human current down Willet Street, David Pascal turned up Rivington. He mopped his forehead, for the day was hot and he was tired. He had had no success as yet, and he had spent practically the whole week buying suspenders that he didn't need, combs that he couldn't wear, and drinks that he didn't want. But to no avail. He had found fallen glamour, but with sordidness; he had found noble bearing, but with a mean interior; he had found keen insight and philosophy without noble bearing. But he had not found noble bearing, combined with fallen glamour and keen insight and philosophy. He could teach, but not build.

So with a sigh, half discouraged, half relief, he entered a small restaurant and ordered a cup of coffee.

He looked around him, but the store was empty, and the storekeeper looked like a storekeeper, and acted like one. Another possibility out of the question.

A few minutes later the door opened and a man entered. He was tall and emaciated. A long white beard straggled despondently and yet defiantly. His dark eyes smoldered with an unquenched fire—a fire that spoke of high ideas and proud ideals. His hair was white and thin; his bearing regal. He seated himself at one of the tables facing Pascal, ordered a glass of tea, and taking a book from a pocket somewhere in his tattered clothes, he started reading, oblivious to all else.

Pascal looked at him almost unbelievingly. The proud head, the fiery eye, the long beard, the dignified carriage! They were all there. He left his coffee untasted, threw a dollar bill at the cashier with a sign not to bother him, and went slowly to the table where the other was sitting.

"I beg your pardon," he began hesitatingly.

The other looked up slowly.

"May I sit down?"

He whose permission was asked nodded gravely and despondently. Years of sub-

mission and silence deepened the sorrowful expression on his face as he made room for the intruder.

"I hardly know how to begin what I wish to say," started the great producer as timidly as a schoolboy. "Here is my card."

The other took the proffered card, read the name without the least show of emotion, and looked back at the man opposite him questioningly.

"The fact is," said Pascal, "I am in the theatrical business—a producer of plays."

The brows of the other drew together forbiddingly. But still he looked silently and questioningly at the intruder.

"Your name?" inquired Pascal, still hesitatingly. "We can talk better if we know each other."

"Mordecai," answered the other simply, but in a voice with such a deep expressive timbre as to make Pascal become still more elated. It was the voice of one who had lived; the voice of one who had died; who had suffered much and seen much.

The two men looked at each other a few moments in silence, and then Mordecai spoke:

"You wish to see me, Mr. Pascal? What is it of me that you want?"

David Pascal pulled himself together and said:

"I am intending to put on a play—a big play—the biggest play New York will ever see; and for the star part I need a man who is a Jew, and who feels like a Jew. It is not a part created for an actor: it is for an actor to create that part. And I perceived that you looked like the character I had in mind. I—"

"An actor—" started Mordecai.

"An actor," interrupted Pascal hurriedly, "in the sense that you will typify the whole Jewish race—show its highlights and its lowlights—its suffering and its joys—the poignant sorrow and the exquisite pain that only you people understand. That is what I need, and that is what I think you can do."

Mordecai leaned across the table. "Mr. Pascal, in other words, you want me to go on the stage, and for the pleasure of a crowd that seeks only sensation, I should bare the sufferings and tortures of my people—"

show our inmost feelings, betray and portray our inner and sacred life and all—for what?"

"The glory of the part, of course, and the chance for the Jewish race to be represented in drama and—"

"Our race has been represented in drama without getting on the stage," said Mordecai with a slow, bitter smile; "it is not needed for us to sham suffering—the suffering is there too plainly."

"That's just it," said Pascal eagerly, "that's just what I need—somebody who has suffered to show it—to portray it—to express it—through the medium of the stage. Here is the play—listen."

And while Pascal talked and sketched the play, incidentally mentioning the salary and a few other matters, Mordecai sat and looked at him with hardly any expression on his mobile face.

It was only when Pascal was finished that he permitted himself to show emotion. He rose, drew himself up to his full height, and said:

"Mr. Pascal, I am indeed grateful to you—for what you think is an opportunity for me—for your saying that I would make an ideal actor, for everything you say—but"—he covered his face with his hands for a moment; then he looked up—tragedy and sorrow without a mask—"you want that for money and for fame I should bring before the footlights the soul of our people—you want that I should sell their souls for the amusements of others! God of our fathers! Has the day come when all will make light of our ancestors—of our customs, our traditions—of our hearts and souls—for money and personal gratification? Hear me"—and he turned fiercely upon Pascal—"you seek to ruin what is our only defense, our only protection—solidarity. You want that I—Mordecai—should bring forth in mockery what is burning in my soul and eating out my heart! You want that I—Mordecai—should in the play cast off my daughter for going on the stage against my ideals! How much more then should I cast myself off for going on the stage against my own and my people's ideals! Oh, my God! Hear me! Protect me against this desecration—this invasion

against the lives of your children—against our thoughts—against the sanctuary of our souls!"

He was speaking with all the fervor of the religious devotee—with the belief of the seeker and student of truth. Pascal watched him with admiration and regret. He knew that if he could get that figure and that voice and those thoughts on the stage he would score a triumph over the souls of his audience. But he had to admit the arguments of Mordecai against the grosser arguments of his profession. And it hurt. But he could play the game.

David Pascal stood up quietly, held out his hand, and said:

"You are right, I am wrong. I am sorry I spoke of this to you, and enraged you. But let us part friends. It has been a privilege to know you."

The other grasped his hand and looked long and searchingly at him. And then, with a sigh, he settled back in his chair, and taking up his book, started reading again, apparently oblivious to all else.

The next morning a young actor with a suit-case in his hand ran up the steps to Pascal's office. The attendant was nowhere around, so Murray Edwards looked in his bag to see that all the necessary things were there: there was the suit of tattered clothes, the long white beard and thin white wig, the decrepit shoes and the box of make-up. Chuckling to himself, he closed the bag, just as the secretary stepped in.

Murray handed him his card with the remark that he wanted to see Mr. Pascal personally.

"For what purpose?"

"Tell him that Mordecai wishes to see him about that new Jewish play—he is putting on."

But the secretary made no move.

"I am sorry, Mr. Edwards," he said, "but Mr. Pascal is out of town. And before he left he gave orders that he wished to see no more applicants for the type as, through something that intervened yesterday, he decided to abandon the whole idea—he has given up the idea of this Jewish play entirely."

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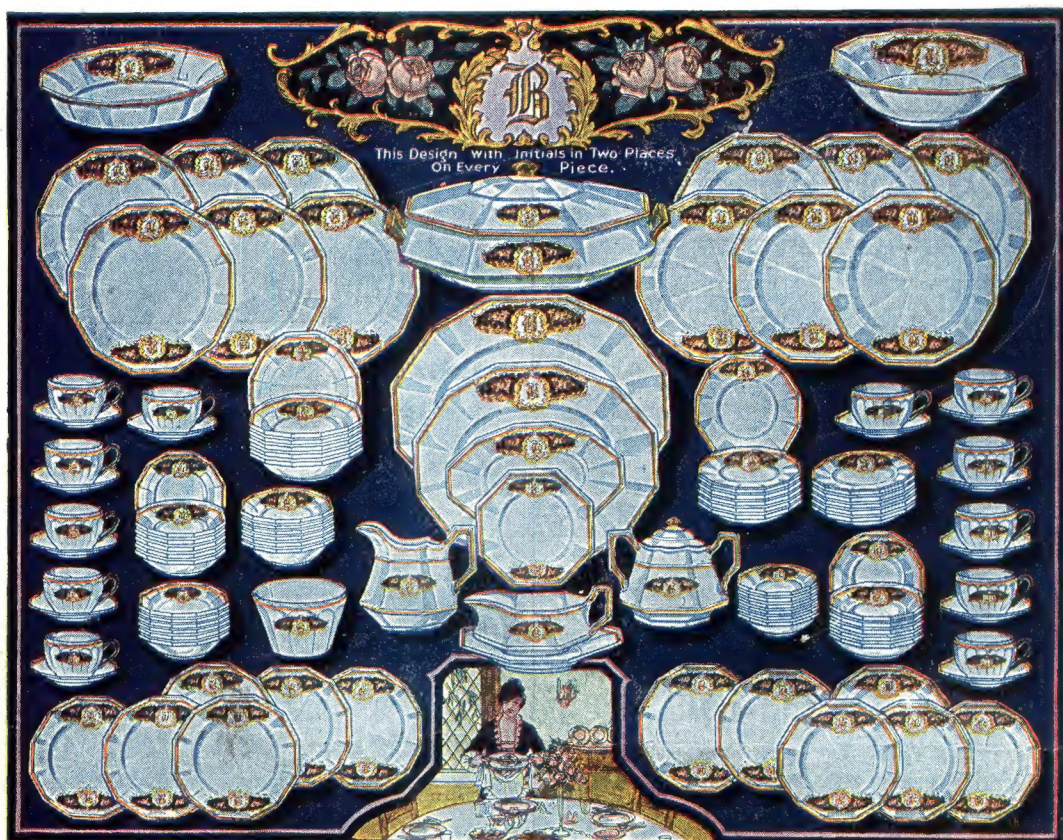


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